This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 06823093 1

THE

# WORKS

OF

# NATHANAEL EMMONS, D. D.

LATE

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN FRANKLIN, MASS.

WITH

## A MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE.

EDITED BY JACOB IDE, D. D.

VOL. III.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY CROCKER & BREWSTER,
NO. 47 WASHINGTON STREET.
1842.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
599097
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.
R 1918 L

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year Eighteen Hundred and Forty Two,

BY CROCKER AND BREWSTER,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

BOSTON:
Printed by S. N. Dickinson,
52 Washington Street.

# VOLUME III.

---

# INSTRUCTIONS TO THE AFFLICTED.

ПВКУВА
ЬИВГІС
МЕАЛОНК

# CONTENTS OF VOLUME III.


SERMON I.—THE PROPER GROUND OF SUBMISSION.

I WAS DUMB, I OPENED NOT MY MOUTH; BECAUSE THOU DIDST IT.—PSALM XXXIX. 9. . . 9

SERMON II.—WATCHFULNESS.

TAKE YE HEED, WATCH AND PRAY; FOR YE KNOW NOT WHEN THE TIME IS.—MARK, XIII. 33. . 19

SERMON III.—DEATH WITHOUT ORDER.

WITHOUT ANY ORDER.—JOB, X. 22. . . . . 29

SERMON IV.—BURDENS CAST UPON GOD.

CAST THY BURDEN UPON THE LORD, AND HE SHALL SUSTAIN THEE.—PSALM LV. 22. . . 41

SERMON V.—BENEFIT OF AFFLICTIONS.

I AM THE LORD THY GOD, WHICH TEACHETH THEE TO PROFIT.—ISAIAH, XLVIII. 17. . . . 53

SERMON VI.—HAPPY DEATH.

AND I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN SAYING UNTO ME, WRITE, BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD, FROM HENCEFORTH; YEA, SAITH THE SPIRIT, THAT THEY MAY REST FROM THEIR LABORS; AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM.—REV. XIV. 13. . 67

SERMON VII.—THE SHORTENING OF HUMAN LIFE.

I AM DEPRIVED OF THE RESIDUE OF MY YEARS.—ISAIAH, XXXVIII. 10. . . . . 79

SERMON VIII.—COMMUNION WITH GOD IN AFFLICTION.

RIGHTEOUS ART THOU, O LORD, WHEN I PLEAD WITH THEE; YET LET ME TALK WITH THEE OF THY JUDGMENTS.—JER. XII. 1. . . . . 93

SERMON IX.—FUTURE STATE OF CHRISTIANS.

BELOVED, NOW ARE WE THE SONS OF GOD, AND IT DOTH NOT YET APPEAR WHAT WE SHALL BE; BUT WE KNOW THAT, WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; FOR WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS.—1 JOHN, III. 2. . . . . 104

SERMON X.—SUBMISSION TO DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

BEHOLD, HE TAKETH AWAY, WHO CAN HINDER HIM? WHO WILL SAY UNTO HIM, WHAT DOEST THOU?—JOB, IX. 12. . . . . 117

SERMON XI.—HOPE IN DEATH.

BUT THE RIGHTEOUS HATH HOPE IN HIS DEATH.—PROV. XIV. 32. . . . . 129

SERMON XII.—HAPPINESS OF SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

AS FOR ME, I WILL BEHOLD THY FACE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS; I SHALL BE SATISFIED, WHEN I AWAKE, WITH THY LIKENESS.—PSALM XVII. 15. . . . . 145

SERMON XIII.—CHRISTIAN PILGRIMS.

THESE ALL DIED IN FAITH, NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES, BUT HAVING SEEN THEM AFAR OFF, AND WERE PERSUADED OF THEM, AND EMBRACED THEM, AND CONFESSED THAT THEY WERE STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS ON THE EARTH.—HEB. XI. 13. . 157

SERMON XIV.—LIVING AND DYING UNTO THE LORD.

FOR WHETHER WE LIVE, WE LIVE UNTO THE LORD; AND WHETHER WE DIE, WE DIE UNTO THE LORD; WHETHER WE LIVE, THEREFORE, OR DIE, WE ARE THE LORD'S.—ROM. XIV. 8. . . . . 169

SERMON XV.—DIVINE PROVIDENCE INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

THY WAY IS IN THE SEA, AND THY PATH IN THE GREAT WATERS, AND THY FOOTSTEPS ARE NOT KNOWN.—PSALM LXXVII. 19. . . . . 181

SERMON XVI.—WISDOM OF HEARING THE VOICE OF AFFLICTION.

THE LORD'S VOICE CRIETH UNTO THE CITY, AND THE MAN OF WISDOM SHALL SEE THY NAME: HEAR YE THE ROD, AND WHO HATH APPOINTED IT.—MICAH, VI. 9. . . . . 193

SERMON XVII.—THE POWER OF GOD TO PREVENT DEATH.

THEN SAID MARTHA UNTO JESUS, LORD, IF THOU HADST BEEN HERE, MY BROTHER HAD NOT DIED.—JOHN, XI. 21. . . . . 205

SERMON XVIII.—A WARNING TO YOUTH.

REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, IN THY YOUTH; AND LET THY HEART CHEER THEE IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH, AND WALK IN THE WAYS OF THINE HEART, AND IN THE SIGHT OF THINE EYES; BUT KNOW THOU, THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT.—ECCL. XI. 9. . . . . 218

SERMON XIX. — EVERY ONE DISPOSED TO THINK HIS AFFLICTIONS PECULIARLY SEVERE.

IS IT NOTHING TO YOU, ALL YE THAT PASS BY? BEHOLD, AND SEE IF THERE BE ANY SORROW LIKE UNTO MY SORROW, WHICH IS DONE UNTO ME, WHEREWITH THE LORD HATH AFFLICTED ME IN THE DAY OF HIS FIERCE ANGER. — LAMENTATIONS, I. 12. . . 231

SERMON XX. — DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IN THE DEATH OF MEN.

I TELL YOU, IN THAT NIGHT THERE SHALL BE TWO MEN IN ONE BED; THE ONE SHALL BE TAKEN, AND THE OTHER SHALL BE LEFT. — LUKE, XVII. 34. . . . . 246

SERMON XXI. — SILENCE UNDER AFFLICTION.

AND AARON HELD HIS PEACE. — LEV. X. 3. . . . . 260

SERMON XXII. — THE TROUBLES OF LIFE DIVINELY APPOINTED.

ALTHOUGH AFFLICTION COMETH NOT FORTH OF THE DUST, NEITHER DOTH TROUBLE SPRING OUT OF THE GROUND; YET MAN IS BORN UNTO TROUBLE, AS THE SPARKS FLY UPWARD. — JOB, V. 6, 7. . . . . 274

SERMON XXIII. — DEATH IN EARLY LIFE.

AND WHEN HE HAD TAKEN HIM AND BROUGHT HIM TO HIS MOTHER, HE SAT UPON HER KNEES TILL NOON, AND THEN DIED. — 2 KINGS, IV. 20. . . . . 287

SERMON XXIV. — RIGHT CONDUCT UNDER THE SMILES AND FROWNS OF GOD.

THE LORD GAVE, AND THE LORD HATH TAKEN AWAY; BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD. — JOB, I. 21. . . . . 301

SERMON XXV. — DEPENDENCE ON MAN FORBIDDEN.

PUT NOT YOUR TRUST IN PRINCES, NOR IN THE SON OF MAN, IN WHOM THERE IS NO HELP; HIS BREATH GOETH FORTH, HE RETURNETH TO HIS EARTH; IN THAT VERY DAY HIS THOUGHTS PERISH. — PSALM CXLVI. 3, 4. . . . . 312

SERMON XXVI. — EXPECTATION OF LONG LIFE UNWISE.

FOR MAN ALSO KNOWETH NOT HIS TIME: AS THE FISHES THAT ARE TAKEN IN AN EVIL NET, AND AS THE BIRDS THAT ARE CAUGHT IN THE SNARE; SO ARE THE SONS OF MEN SNARED IN AN EVIL TIME, WHEN IT FALLETH SUDDENLY UPON THEM. — ECCLES. IX. 12. . . . . 326

SERMON XXVII. — SOULS OF BELIEVERS LIVE SEPARATE FROM THEIR BODIES.

HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE. — JOHN, XI. 25. . 338

SERMON XXVIII. — COMFORT IN CHRIST.

AS THE SHADOW OF A GREAT ROCK IN A WEARY LAND. — ISAIAH, XXXII. 2. . . . . 352

SERMON XXIX.—DEATH OF SAINTS.

PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD IS THE DEATH OF HIS SAINTS.—PSALM CXVI. 15. . 366

SERMON XXX.—ENTIRE DEVOTION TO DUTY.

WHATSOEVER THY HAND FINDETH TO DO, DO IT WITH THY MIGHT; FOR THERE IS NO WORK, NOR DEVICE, NOR KNOWLEDGE, NOR WISDOM, IN THE GRAVE WHITHER THOU GOEST.—ECCL. IX. 10. . . . . 380

SERMON XXXI.—THE HOUSE OF THE GRAVE.

IF I WAIT, THE GRAVE IS MY HOUSE.—JOB, XVII. 13. . . . . 393

SERMON XXXII.—DEPENDENCE ON GOD FOR LIFE.

AND THE GOD IN WHOSE HAND THY BREATH IS, AND WHOSE ARE ALL THY WAYS, HAST THOU NOT GLORIFIED.—DANIEL, V. 23. . . . . 407

SERMON XXXIII.—GOOD MEN WAIT FOR THE DAY OF THEIR DEATH.

IF A MAN DIE, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN? ALL THE DAYS OF MY APPOINTED TIME WILL I WAIT, TILL MY CHANGE COME.—JOB, XIV. 14. . . . . 419

SERMON XXXIV.—THE LIVING GO TO THE DEAD.

I SHALL GO TO HIM, BUT HE SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME.—2 SAMUEL, XII. 23. . . . . 432

SERMON XXXV.—DEATH IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.

I SAID, O MY GOD, TAKE ME NOT AWAY IN THE MIDST OF MY DAYS.—PSALM CII. 24. . . 447

SERMON XXXVI.—THE WORD OF GOD TAUGHT BY HIS PROVIDENCE.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOM THOU CHASTENEST, O LORD, AND TEACHEST HIM OUT OF THY LAW.—PSALM XCIV. 12. . . . . 459

SERMON XXXVII.—VIEW OF ETERNITY.

WHILE WE LOOK NOT AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN, BUT AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN; FOR THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN ARE TEMPORAL; BUT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL.—2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 18. . . . . 472

SERMON XXXVIII.—SAINTS WITH CHRIST IN HEAVEN.

FATHER, I WILL THAT THEY ALSO WHOM THOU HAST GIVEN ME, BE WITH ME WHERE I AM.—JOHN, XVII. 24. . . . . 487

# SERMON I.

## THE PROPER GROUND OF SUBMISSION.

FUNERAL OF MRS. BATHSHEBA SANFORD, WIFE OF REV. DAVID SANFORD, OF MEDWAY: NOVEMBER 17, 1800.

I WAS dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. — PSALM XXXIX. 9

WE have reason to believe that David composed this psalm under the impression of some striking instance of mortality. He pours out his heart before God in this plaintive language: "I was dumb with silence; I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." In this strain he proceeds, until he says in the text, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." This last expression more naturally applies to some bereavement, than to any other affliction; and more properly describes the feelings of a pious mourner, than those of any other person. It seems the Psalmist had lately suffered the loss of some near relative, or very dear and intimate friend. This affliction at first threw his mind into a painful conflict; but while he was musing in solitude, he had a clear and realizing sense that his bereavement came from God, which bowed his heart in humble submission to the divine will. The spirit and language of the text, therefore, invite our attention to this plain truth:

That a consideration of bereavements coming from God, is the proper ground of true submission.

To illustrate this sentiment, it is necessary to show,

I. That bereavements come from God: and,

II. That this consideration is the proper ground of true submission.

I. Let us consider that bereavements come from God.

Death, like every other event, is entirely under the dominion of God, who is deeply concerned in every instance of mortality. This good men have always been ready to acknowledge. David says, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." Job expresses the same sentiment with equal plainness and sincerity. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." This leads me to observe,

1. That the agency of God is concerned in every instance of bereavement. As it belongs to God to give and to preserve life, so it equally belongs to him to take it away. He constantly carries the life and death of every individual in his sovereign hand. Though men are surrounded with a multiplicity of natural causes which have a tendency to destroy life, yet these cannot destroy it without the agency of God. For he can preserve the life of whom he pleases, in the midst of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. And though men are surrounded with a multiplicity of natural causes which have a tendency to preserve life, yet these cannot preserve it without the agency of God. For behold, he taketh away, and who can hinder him? Whether death comes by disease, or by accident, or by old age, it always comes through the agency of him in whose hand our breath is. Hence every one who is bereaved of a friend or relative has reason to believe and say, The Lord hath done it.

2. Every bereavement comes from the counsel as well as from the hand of God. He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. He determined all his own conduct before the foundation of the world. He does nothing in time, but what he had from eternity absolutely resolved to do. His agency, in every instance, flows from his original and immutable purpose. It is evident, therefore, that every bereavement, with all its circumstances, comes exactly according to a divine appointment. In particular,

The *time* of a bereavement is appointed. There is an appointed time to every man upon earth. God has determined the number of his months, and of his days, and fixed the bounds of his life that he cannot pass. In appointing the day of death, God had respect not only to those who are taken away, but also to those who are left to bemoan their loss. As there is a good and an evil time to die, so there is a good and an evil time to be bereaved. It is good for the righteous to be

taken away from the evil to come; and it is evil to the wicked to be taken away in their wickedness. It is good to be bereaved, when the body and mind are able to endure affliction; and it is evil to be bereaved, when the body and mind are enfeebled, by age or sickness. This was foreknown to God, and accordingly he appointed the particular time of every bereavement, with a particular design, either to diminish, or to increase the burden of the afflicted.

The *connection* as well as time of bereavements is appointed. This is an interesting circumstance to the bereaved. When bereavements come singly, and at a considerable distance from each other, they are much more easily borne; but when they come in a train and in thick succession, like the waves of the sea, billow after billow, they sink the mourner in the depths of sorrow. It was this painful connection which gave tenfold weight to the afflictions of Job. In one day, loss came upon loss, and bereavement upon bereavement, until he was left entirely desolate and forlorn. All bereavements come in just such a connection as God appointed, in order to make the bereaved more or less sensible of the weight of his correcting hand.

It is farther to be observed, that the *nature*, as well as the time and connection of bereavements, is appointed. There is a great and sensible difference in the nature of bereavements. One is much more severe than another. Mankind are bound together by a thousand different ties. Some are more and some are less intimately connected. But the more nearly and tenderly any persons are united by the ties of nature or friendship, the more distressing is a final separation by death. Hence it is more grievous to lose a husband or a wife, than to lose a son or a daughter; and to lose an intimate friend, than a remote relation. To some persons, God has appointed only a few and light afflictions. And of course, he never calls them to bury any near relatives, nor dear and intimate friends. But to others he has appointed many and severe bereavements. And accordingly he dissolves one tender tie after another, until he has made them bleed in every vein. He never strikes lighter, nor heavier, than he meant to strike. His hand is always guided by his counsel. When he sends bereavements, he invariably sends them in weight and in measure, according to his sovereign and eternal appointment. Besides,

3. Bereavements come not only from the hand and counsel, but even from the heart, of God. He does nothing but what he designs, and he designs nothing but what is agreeable to his heart. His perfect benevolence approves of every bereavement with which he visits either his friends, or his enemies.

Though he loves his friends with a strong and peculiar affection, yet this very affection often leads him to wound their hearts, by calling them to part with their dearest connections. Though he felt a tender regard for Abraham his friend, yet he called him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. Though Job was his peculiar favorite, yet no man was ever visited with more severe and distressing bereavements. The executive officer frequently inflicts a punishment which his heart abhors. The parent often grieves the heart of a child, without the least apprehension of doing it. And mankind are continually giving one another pain and distress, of which they are totally ignorant. But God always knows how the bereaved will feel under his bereaving hand, and his heart always approves of every bereavement, in all its peculiar and painful circumstances. Hence bereavements, in all respects, come from God. For they come through his agency, according to his appointment, and agreeably to his heart. I proceed to show,

II. That this consideration is the proper ground of true submission.

David knew no other just ground of submission, in the instance to which he refers in the text. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." At another time, when he expected to be deprived of his friends, of his throne, and of every earthly enjoyment, he felt and expressed the same submission, in the view of the absolute and incomprehensible sovereignty of God. "Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." When Samuel told Eli that God was about to visit him with singular and severe bereavements, he said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." When the prophet informed Hezekiah of the terrible calamities which God had determined to bring upon his family and kingdom, he submissively replied, "Good is the word of the Lord." Job said, while feeling and fearing the correcting hand of God, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." When the servant of the prophet asked the Shunammite, who had lost her darling son, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child? She answered, It is well." All these instances of true submission were entirely founded on the consideration that afflictions and bereavements come from God. And this consideration always affords a proper and sufficient ground of entire submission, under the bereaving strokes of divine providence.

For, in the first place, if bereavements come from God, then they are certainly just. Though they are not joyous, but extremely grievous, yet they never bring more pain and anguish of heart to the bereaved, than they have really deserved. All

men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, for which they deserve to be severely chastised. And one way which God takes to chastise them for their offences, is to visit them with bereavements. These are sometimes light, and sometimes heavy; but they are never heavier than the bereaved have merited from the hand of their offended sovereign. Though divine judgments are often involved in clouds and darkness, yet they are always marked with justice. This is an important truth, which good men in all ages have been ready to discover and acknowledge. After God had severely corrected his peculiar people, Ezra says, "Our God has punished us less than our iniquities deserved." David, speaking upon the subject of divine chastisement says, "The Lord will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Such a sense of the justice of divine corrections affords a solid foundation for silence and submission.

Secondly, if bereavements come from God, then they are wise as well as just. God never corrects his friends, nor his enemies, in this world, merely to display his justice. The present life is a state of trial, not of retribution. God chastises our guilty race only when his chastisements will answer some wise and important purpose. His unerring wisdom is concerned in fixing the proper time, the peculiar nature, and the precise weight of every affliction. He knows the state and circumstances of the whole family of mankind, and it is only, "if need be," that he visits any individual with any pain, calamity or bereavement. His most afflictive dispensations, therefore, flow from infinite wisdom. And this consideration forbids every murmur and complaint, and calls for the cordial and unreserved submission of mourners.

Thirdly, if bereavements come from God, then they are not only wise and just, but perfectly kind and benevolent. They flow from the fountain of goodness. There is none good but one, that is God. His pure and impartial benevolence extends to all his creatures. He uniformly seeks the highest interest of the universe, in the whole course of his providence. Though he sometimes sends evil, it is only for the sake of some greater good. And though he does not always seek the personal benefit of the afflicted and bereaved, yet he always seeks a good superior to their private and personal sufferings. But when he bereaves his friends, who stand in a peculiar relation to himself, then he corrects with peculiar and paternal tenderness. David says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." And the apostle says, "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom

he receiveth." How consoling is this reflection to the bereaved child of God, who feels the spirit of adoption, and can cry, Abba, Father, while sensibly feeling the smart of his rod! Like the man after God's own heart, he must submit in silence, because it is his heavenly Father who corrects. The single consideration, that God never afflicts nor grieves the children of men but in justice, wisdom and goodness, affords a plain and solid reason for the most cheerful and unreserved submission under the severest bereavements.

It now remains to improve and apply the subject, agreeably to the present mournful occasion.

1. If a consideration of bereavements coming from God be the proper ground of submission; then the afflicted may be truly submissive, while they have a painful sense of the loss they have sustained. Though submission will produce silence, yet it will not produce insensibility. Nothing but what is painful to the body or distressing to the mind, can give occasion for the exercise of a truly submissive spirit. Sensibility is so far from being inconsistent with submission, that it is absolutely essential to its existence. No person can exercise submission while he feels no evil. If God did not mean to give pain and distress by bereavements, the bereaved would be under no obligation to submit. For they are not required to submit to pain or distress itself, but to the just, and wise, and benevolent being who inflicts it. They may, therefore, exercise entire submission to the will of God, while they most painfully feel the weight of his correcting hand. Indeed, a consideration of bereavements coming from God, instead of diminishing, greatly increases the anguish and distress of the pious heart. For there is nothing more painful to good men, than a realizing sense of the frowns of God, whom they sincerely and supremely love. But the same supreme affection which excites their keenest sensibility, no less excites their most cheerful submission, under the marks of the divine displeasure. And hence they enjoy the pleasure of submission, in proportion to the pain of suffering.

2. If a consideration of bereavements coming from God, be the proper ground of true submission, then those who are bereaved can never exercise true submission, from any other consideration. Many who are utterly destitute of the love of God, manifest great composure of mind under his bereaving hand, which they and others are apt to imagine is genuine submission. But such apparent submission is either real stupidity, or something worse. It commonly arises from a total disregard to God, by whom they are afflicted. Man is born like the wild ass's colt. Stupidity is the natural effect of moral depravity. So

long as this reigns in the heart, men are prone to overlook the heart and hand of God, in all his afflictive, as well as merciful dispensations. Hence the Psalmist says of the sinner, God's "judgments are far above out of his sight." Those who are blind to the divine agency in bereavements, derive all their calmness, ease and serenity, from self-dependence and self-sufficiency. They determine to support themselves as well as they can under the evils they suffer, because they imagine they could not be avoided, or because they imagine they cannot be removed. But such views and feelings must be banished from the minds of the bereaved, before they can exercise any true submission. For this essentially consists in bowing their wills to the will of God. Such was the nature of Christ's submission. When it pleased the Father to afflict him, he said from the heart, "Father, not my will, but thine be done." The bereaved are greatly deluded, if they imagine that they feel truly submissive, while they hear not the rod, nor him who hath appointed it. They have one ground, and but one ground of submission, and that is a consideration of their bereavements coming from God. Hence,

3. The ground of their submission is the only source of true consolation. If their bereavements came from the dust, or sprang from the ground, where would they find the least source of real satisfaction? But that which is the ground of their submission, is no less the ground of their comfort. While they realize the hand of God in their afflictions, and cordially submit to his holy and sovereign will, they cannot fail of finding sweet and solid consolation. They must enjoy that peace of God, which passeth all understanding. The duty and happiness of the afflicted are intimately, naturally, and almost necessarily connected. Nothing can put them into the more full enjoyment of God, than a cheerful and unconditional submission to his just, and wise, and benevolent dispensations. David appeared to be happy, when he said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." Job appeared to be happy, when he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The primitive christians appeared to be happy when they said, "As dying, and behold, we live; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." While pious mourners are deeply impressed with a sense of their bereavements coming from God, and while they muse in silent and cordial submission to his fatherly chastisements, they have a season of peculiar enjoyment. God appears in all his glory; and they see his justice, his goodness, his faithfulness, and his amiable and awful sovereignty, in a clear and

striking light. Hence it often comes to pass that the true friends of God never enjoy him more fully and sensibly, than while he is visiting them with the sorest bereavements. The duty which God requires of the bereaved is both plain and pleasant. It is to be still, and know that he is God. It is to exalt him on the throne, and take their own place at his footstool. It is to trust in the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God.

Here, then, my bereaved and much respected brother will permit me to point him to the only source of comfort in his present afflicted and trying situation.

Dear sir: you have for days been eating the bread of mourners, and lamenting a bereavement which you had long and painfully anticipated. The Lord has finally come and taken away the wife of your youth. Hereby he has made your house desolate, and caused you to sigh in silence over the remains of her, who sustained the amiable character of the virtuous woman. She accompanied you a great way in the journey of life. With you she joined morning and evening in addressing the throne of divine grace. Together with you she walked to the house of God from Sabbath to Sabbath, and there, from time to time, united with you and your christian friends in celebrating the astonishing love of the divine Redeemer. She long labored with you in rearing up a large, amiable and promising family. For your sake she looked well to her household, ordered her domestic concerns with prudence and economy, and exhausted her strength by perpetual industry. With you she rejoiced under the smiles of Heaven, and with you she mourned in the days of affliction. In a word, she made it her study to lighten your cares, to alleviate your burdens, and to promote your comfort and usefulness, in the important sphere in which you have been called to act. But the Sovereign Disposer of all events has been pleased, for wise and holy reasons, first to put a period to her health, and at last to her life. He now requires you to be "dumb, and not open your mouth, because he has done it." This is that dutiful, decent, and christian conduct which highly becomes you as a man, as a christian, and especially as an aged and experienced minister of Christ. You have long been preaching submission to others; but you are now called to feel and express it yourself. You have often directed mourners to cast their cares and burdens upon the Lord; but you are now called to follow your own directions, and carry your own sorrows to the God of all grace and consolation. He allows you to weep, but not to repine. To murmur and complain will only increase your darkness and distress; but to be silent and submit will afford

you the highest enjoyment. God will certainly comfort you if you refuse not to be comforted. Draw near to him, and he will draw near to you. Only turn at his reproof, converse with him in his providence, rely on his faithfulness, and take him for your portion, and you will at once glorify his name, do honor to his cause, and promote your highest happiness both in this life and in that which is to come.

The bereaved children will please to consider, that it is their duty to regard the hand of God in their present affliction. The Lord has taken away your faithful and affectionate mother, who once carried you in her arms, who long bore you upon her heart, and who always expressed the tenderest concern for your present and future good. You have abundant reason to remember with gratitude, "the years of the right hand of the Most High;" and with silence submit to his holy and righteous providence. Your dear departed mother will never return to you, but you must each of you in your turn go to her. Henceforth when you think of her, you must think of eternity, where she has gone, and whither you are constantly going. Her death speaks louder than words, and bids you to be wise, to understand this, to consider your latter end. Let not stupidity stop your ears, nor natural affections harden your hearts. Humbly look up to the father of your spirits, by whom you are chastened, and learn obedience and submission by the things which you suffer. In this way you may be assured your light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The church and congregation in this place must feel themselves deeply affected by this instance of mortality. Mrs. Sanford, ever since her lot was cast among you, very justly merited your sincere affection and esteem, by her prudent, peaceable, friendly conduct. She ever appeared to seek your real prosperity, and spared no labor nor pains, in her subordinate sphere, to promote your highest interests. Some years ago, God was pleased to pour out his spirit in plentiful measures, and revive his languishing cause among you. At that peculiar season, he put it into the power and into the heart of the person you lament, to perform those acts of kindness to you, and to others laboring for your good, which neither you nor they can ever forget. As a people, you have sustained a heavy loss, which calls you to mourn for yourselves, and silently submit to the bereaving hand of providence. Nor is this all. There is another peculiar, important, christian duty devolved upon you; I mean the too much forgotten and too much neglected duty, of weeping with them that weep, and mourning with them that mourn. The present situation of your

bereaved pastor calls for your friendly and sympathetic attentions. How often has he mourned and wept with you! How often has his presence and friendly discourse poured the balm of consolation into your wounded hearts! Can you, then, forget or forsake him, while he sits solitary in his lonely dwelling? Now is your time to give, and his to receive, the peculiar token of love and respect. If you feel for him, you will feel for yourselves. If you pray for him, you will pray for yourselves. And whatever you do to comfort and relieve a member and minister of Christ, he will finally acknowledge and reward, as done to himself.

Finally, be entreated to remember that your days are numbered, and will shortly be finished. The day of death cannot be far distant from any, and may be much nearer to some, than either they or others imagine. It highly concerns you all, to stand in the posture of servants waiting for the coming of their lord. You know not how soon you may be called to follow her into eternity, whose remains you this day follow to the tomb. Here you have often been admonished by the voice of man, to prepare for a dying hour; but it is the voice of God which now speaks in this house, and bids you to be ready also. And if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, but set your souls in order; that you may meet not only death, but your final Judge, in peace. Amen.

# SERMON II.

## WATCHFULNESS.

FUNERAL OF MR. SAMUEL ROCKWOOD, WHO DIED APRIL 25, 1801, IN HIS 55TH YEAR.

TAKE ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is. — MARK, xiii. 33.

OUR Saviour was perfectly acquainted with futurity. All the objects and events of time lay open to his all-comprehensive view. This qualified him to instruct his disciples, and through them all succeeding generations of mankind, upon the most solemn and interesting subjects. At a certain time when he was going out of the temple, one of his disciples desired him to observe the beauty and magnificence of that ancient and venerable building. But instead of admiring its materials and structure, he only foretold its speedy and final ruin. This prediction made a deep impression upon the minds of Peter, James and John, who asked him privately, "when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" These questions led him into a free and familiar discourse with his disciples, in which he told them, that false Christs should arise and deceive many; that fiery trials and bloody persecutions should fall to their lot, and to the lot of those who should embrace the gospel; that wars, and famines, and earthquakes, should involve whole nations and kingdoms in confusion and distress; and that these desolating judgments should come suddenly and unexpectedly, even in their day. In the view of these fatal evils, which he was about to bring upon the earth, and which would sweep multitudes into eternity, he exhorted all to stand constantly prepared for the solemn and uncertain hour of death. "Take

ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." This is the connection of the text, and in this connection, it suggests this serious truth to our present consideration:

Since all men are uncertain when they shall die, it concerns them to live in a constant preparation for dying, I shall show,

I. That all men are uncertain when they shall die.

II. That it concerns all to live in a constant preparation for dying.

III. What it is to live in such a manner.

1. Let us consider, that all men are uncertain when they shall die. Ye know not, says our Lord, when the time is. He could have informed every man when he should die; but he never gave this information to any of the human race, not even to his most dear and intimate friends. All the inspired writers are equally silent upon this solemn subject. Though the Bible reveals many great and important events, yet it draws a dark veil over the grave, and entirely hides the day of death from all the living. Nor can any, by the aid of reason, learning and observation, determine the time of their departure from the stage of life. After all the calculations which have ever been made upon the subject of mortality, the grave still appears without any order. Though providence gives us many signs of the times, and enables us to form many probable conjectures concerning futurity, yet providence gives us no signs of life, nor symptoms of death, upon which either the young or the old, the strong or the weak, the wise or the unwise, may safely rely. There are innumerable diseases and accidents which no human wisdom can foresee, and which no human power can resist; and to these instruments of death we are all continually exposed. Who in this assembly can discover, with the least degree of certainty, which of our names stands next in death's commission? The present instance of mortality is instead of a thousand arguments, to demonstrate the total ignorance of all men respecting the day of their decease. No man ever knows whether there be more than a single step between him and eternity. Those who are boasting of to-morrow, and flattering themselves with the hopes of long life, may be the very first to meet the king of terrors. "As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Divine providence concurs with divine revelation, to teach all men that they are utterly uncertain when they shall die. Hence,

II. It concerns all to live in a constant preparation for dying. All come into the world unfit to go out of it. All are by nature destitute of that holiness, without which they cannot see

nor enjoy God. This life is designed to be a state of preparation for the next; and the great business of living is to prepare for dying. And could men only be brought to realize what a great and interesting change death will be, they would feel the importance of being duly and constantly prepared to meet it. Here, then, let all consider some of the solemn effects and consequences of dying. When death comes, it will take down and destroy their clayey tabernacles, in which they have dwelt from their earliest existence. It will separate the soul from the body, and reduce the latter to a mass of corruption and a heap of dust. It will pay no more respect to the prince than to the peasant, to the rich than to the poor, to the most lovely than to the most unlovely forms of human nature. It will completely level all the outward, visible, admired distinctions of mankind, in the loathsome grave. And though the deceased will be altogether regardless of their mortal part, yet they cannot be insensible of losing all the happiness which they once derived from their bodily senses. The dissolution of the body must therefore be an amazing shock to the mind, and too heavy for those to endure, who have made no preparation for the world of spirits.

When death comes and destroys the body, it will put a final period to all the pursuits and employments of the present life. In the day that death seizes the sons of men, in that very day all their worldly thoughts must perish, and all their earthly employments cease. "If a man die, shall he live again?" No: he shall never return to his house or to his farm, to the bar or to the pulpit, to the seat of justice or to the throne of power. Men of every order and profession are naturally attached to the business in which they are habitually employed. All the concerns of life exercise the powers and faculties of the mind, and prevent it from preying upon itself by contemplating those things which create uneasiness, disgust, or remorse. Many are perpetually forming worldly schemes of a public or private nature, which they view as highly important, and in the prosecution of which they take peculiar satisfaction. And while their heads and hearts are deeply engaged in accomplishing the objects of their wishes, they cannot bear the thought of dying and leaving their agreeable designs unfinished. What a great and distressing change, therefore, must death be to those who have been wholly absorbed in the cares and pursuits of the present life! When all these objects of their former attention shall forever cease to employ their thoughts, what can they discover in the invisible world, to fill the mighty void which death has made in their capacious and active minds? It must be extremely painful to contemplate, without interruption and

without end, their past schemes, and hopes, and expectations, which are completely and forever disappointed.

When death comes, it will destroy all earthly possessions and enjoyments. As men bring nothing into the world with them, so they can carry nothing out. When they are called to quit the body, they must leave their treasures, their relations, their connections, and all their outward distinctions, behind them. Death will deprive them of all these sources of earthly enjoyment. When the master shall die, he will cease to be a master; when the parent shall die, he will cease to be a parent; when the minister shall die, he will cease to be a minister; when the ruler shall die, he will cease to be a ruler; and when the rich man shall die, he will cease to be rich. Persons of all orders and ages must meet together in the grave, stripped of all their outward distinctions, and deprived of all their earthly enjoyments. And when all these idols are taken away, what will they have left, to satisfy the desires of a selfish and sinful heart?

Death will produce another and more serious and solemn effect. It will put a final period to the day of grace and the space for repentance. When it comes and proclaims that time shall be no longer, then the motions of the Spirit, the offers of mercy, and the promises of salvation, will forever cease. He that is unholy, must be unholy still. He that is filthy, must be filthy still. No mistakes can be rectified, no neglects can be retrieved, beyond the grave. As the soul leaves the body, so it must appear before God, and receive its final doom. Death will open or shut the gates of heaven for ever. There will be no alteration in the state of the dead. They shall never pass from heaven to hell, nor from hell to heaven. This our Saviour hath clearly taught us, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Death will forever separate the sinner from the saint; and whither death first conveys the naked soul, there it must remain to all eternity. Whenever death comes, it will produce such great and lasting effects. And for this reason, it highly concerns all to live in a constant preparation for their dying day, which will be the most important day in the whole period of their existence.

III. It only remains to show what it is to live constantly prepared for this great and last change. There is both an habitual and actual preparation for death. The habitual preparation for dying essentially consists in believing in Christ. So he expressly tells us himself. "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." Saving faith forms a vital union between Christ and believers,

which effectually secures their future and everlasting happiness. Hence Christ told his disciples when he was about to leave them, "Because I live ye shall live also." Those who repent, and cordially embrace the divine Redeemer, are habitually prepared to pass out of time into eternity. They are truly in Christ, and those who are in him, may die in peace and safety. For we read, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." They "rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." But it is a practical preparation for death, which Christ more especially inculcates in the text. "Take ye heed, watch and pray." In illustrating this practical preparation for dying, I would observe,

1. That it implies living constantly mindful of death. Taking heed and watching plainly denote a strict and constant attention to an object. To watch for death is to keep it in mind, and live in actual expectation of its certain and near approach. We find the ancient saints lived under a realizing sense of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and of the certainty and nearness of death. They felt like dying creatures, walking upon the verge of time and the borders of eternity. This appears from the description which the apostle gives of their holy and heavenly lives. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." And Paul, speaking of the uncertainty of life, solemnly protests, "I die daily." Such a daily and lively apprehension of leaving the world belongs to a practical preparation for death. By keeping the great and serious event in view, the mind becomes familiar with it, and better prepared to meet it. When men go out and come in, lie down and rise up, with a realizing sense of their own mortality, death loses its power to surprise them, and affords them an excellent antidote against itself.

2. To be properly prepared for death, it is necessary to desire, as well as to expect it. Death may be expected without being desired. We read of those, "who, through fear of death, are all their life time subject to bondage." A painful apprehension of leaving the world unfits men for a dying hour. But, on the other hand, sincere desires to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, prepare the soul for the day of dissolution. Many of the people of God have expressed their sincere and ardent desires to be removed from the scenes of mortality, and placed in the presence and enjoyment of God. Job says, "I would not live alway." And this agrees with what he says again, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change comes." He not only expected death, but

really desired it, as a most agreeable as well as important event. David says to God, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." And Paul expresses still more fervent desires to be in heaven. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Those who thus desire to depart out of the world, and live longing for immortality, are happily prepared to meet and conquer the king of terrors. I may add,

3. The constant discharge of the duties of life is implied in a constant preparation for death. This is plainly intimated in our Lord's admonition to prepare for his coming. "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning." The sovereign Lord of life has placed all men here in this world, in the station of servants. He has given every one a work to perform, and commanded all to do with their might whatsoever their hands find to do. If they are slothful or unfaithful in his service, they are unfit to meet him at his coming. But while they are active, diligent, and faithful in discharging the duties assigned them, they are properly prepared, at any moment, to leave their work, and to give an account of the talents they have received. In this way, our Saviour himself lived in a constant preparation for death. "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." And by living agreeably to this maxim, he was prepared to leave the world at the time appointed. "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." All ought to follow this example of Christ in the discharge of the duties of life, that they may be constantly prepared to die in peace. There are both secular and religious duties to be performed in the present state. We must faithfully pursue our secular employments, which are necessary to promote the temporal good of ourselves and others. These employments are numerous and various; but whatever a man's proper business is, he must be diligent and persevering in the performance of it. No one has a right to be idle in any lawful calling. Whether he acts in a public or private capacity, he

ought to exert his best abilities in discharging the duties of his station. Nothing short of performing day by day the proper business of the day, will properly prepare men for the night of death. But no secular concerns ought to supersede or obstruct the duties of devotion. The performance of these has a direct and powerful tendency to prepare men for dying. Hence says our Lord in the text, "take ye heed, watch and pray." Circumspection and watchfulness, meditation and prayer, are always proper for dying creatures, who are every day, every hour, and every moment, liable to be called out of time into eternity. These duties bring God, and Christ, and heaven, and the great realities of the invisible world into view, and directly tend to prepare the mind to appear in the presence of the Deity, and to join the company of the blessed in all their holy and delightful employments. Those who live in the daily and delightful performance of the duties of devotion, are constantly and practically prepared for the coming of their Lord, and for a joyful entrance into his heavenly kingdom.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since all men are uncertain when they shall die, it is extremely absurd for any to expect that they shall live a great while in the world. Not only the young and the healthy, but even the aged and infirm, often cherish the hope of seeing many days more in the land of the living. Though every one knows that it is appointed to all men once to die, yet because he is uncertain of the day appointed for his own death, he is ready to imagine that his mountain stands strong, and though others may be called to die, yet he shall be allowed to live. All who have not lived to old age, are apt to indulge a strong expectation of reaching that period of life, because they are uncertain of dying before. And even those who have seen three-score years and ten, are still apt to lot upon four-score years. This is reasoning in direct opposition to the voice and providence of God. He has concealed from mortals, the day of their dissolution, to excite and keep up a constant expectation of dying; but they absurdly and presumptuously improve this very circumstance, to cherish a constant expectation of living. God says to every man, "boast not thyself of to-morrow: for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." But most men are prone to draw a very different conclusion from their ignorance of futurity, and to say in their hearts, "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." How absurd and dangerous is such presumptuous language in the mouths of those who know not but the next moment may be their last!

2. If all men are uncertain when they shall die, then there is as a great propriety in their preparing to die, as in their preparing to live. There is the same uncertainty with respect to living, as with respect to dying. But notwithstanding the uncertainty of living, all feel the propriety of providing food and raiment, and the necessaries and conveniences of life. Though they know not how soon they may be called to leave the world and all its enjoyments, yet they do not consider the uncertainty of life as any reason to neglect or prepare for living. Why then should any consider the uncertainty of dying as any reason to neglect preparing for that serious and important event? They may die in any future moment; and therefore not a moment is to be lost, which may be improved in a preparation for death. A preparation for living ought never to supersede a preparation for dying, which is of all things of the most importance to the probationers for eternity. If some neglect to provide the necessaries of life for themselves, yet the care, and labor, and kindness of others, may prevent their suffering the fatal consequences of their folly and negligence. But if any neglect to prepare themselves for dying, none of their friends can prepare them for it, or prevent them from falling into the pit of destruction. Why should so many build houses, plant vineyards, and lay up goods for many years, rather than set their houses and their souls in order for that great and last change to which they are every day and every moment exposed? If an uncertain prospect of living prompts men to prepare for living, why should not an uncertain prospect of dying prompt them to prepare for dying? All men are equally blind to futurity, and none can be more certain that they shall live to any future period than that they shall die before that period arrives. Why then should they not improve every day in preparing to die as well as in preparing to live? It is much more proper, because it is much more important, to prepare for a sudden death than for a long life.

3. If it equally concerns all men to be in preparation for death, then it argues extreme folly in any to be more ashamed to prepare for dying, than to die. Mortality is inseparably connected with humanity, and no man has any reason to be ashamed of the law of his nature. But though neither the young nor the old, neither the rich nor the poor, are ashamed to die, yet multitudes are ashamed to prepare for dying. A due preparation for death requires men to live holy, devout, heavenly, prayerful lives; to realize the vanity of all earthly enjoyments, and to derive their supreme happiness from the love and enjoyment of God. But how many of our dying race are ashamed to perform the proper and important duties of

dying creatures! How many are ashamed to read the Bible, to call upon God in secret and private, to converse upon religious and divine subjects, and to name the name of Christ! How many are ashamed to conform to the spirit and precepts of the gospel, in their common intercourse among mankind! How many are ashamed even to be thought serious, devout and religious! How many are ashamed to give their children a pious education, and to do as much to prepare them for dying, as to prepare them for living! But what reason have dying creatures for being ashamed to live, and for teaching others to live, as dying creatures? Will they not rather bewail their neglect of these things when time shall be no longer? "Ask death-beds, they can tell." How many miserable creatures have bitterly lamented, with their dying breath, their past negligence to prepare for eternity! And who can expect to escape such a miserable end, unless they "watch and pray," and make it their constant concern to prepare for the coming of their Lord?

4. If all men are uncertain when they shall die, then they ought to beware of placing too much dependence upon one another. It is folly and presumption in dying creatures to make each other the object of truth and confidence. But it is the natural disposition of all mankind to run into this dangerous error. Rulers and subjects, ministers and people, parents and children, husbands and wives, and all who have formed intimate connections, are extremely prone to forget that death may, at any moment, dissolve their tenderest ties, and blast their fondest hopes and expectations. Such misplaced and presumptuous confidence is naturally calculated to prepare the human heart for the keenest anguish and distress. What multitudes have made themselves unspeakably wretched, by placing that dependence upon dying creatures, which ought to have been placed upon the ever-living God! Let us beware of the danger, which the experience of ages so clearly discovers, and which the Father of mercies so kindly and solemnly warns us to avoid. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of? His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth: in that very day his thoughts perish." But there is not only folly, but guilt and danger, in distrusting God and confiding in man. Hence says the prophet, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Our duty and safety lies in renouncing all dependence upon our frail fellow mortals, and in placing our entire trust and confidence in our great Creator. For we are assured, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope

the Lord is." Such a firm and constant reliance upon God is the only ground of hope, and the only source of consolation to any of mankind, while they are passing through this dying world, where they are born to sorrows and bereavements, as the sparks fly upward.

How often and how suddenly does God destroy the hopes and expectations which we place upon our fellow mortals! And what a striking instance of mortality and bereavement now lies before us! We are called to perform the last sad office to one who but a few days, and perhaps but a few hours, before his death, had not the least apprehension of being so near the close of life and the verge of eternity. The sudden decease of Mr. Rockwood is a very solemn and instructive event. His sobriety, his integrity, and his serious regard to divine things, rendered him an amiable and useful man. And hence his aged mother, his dear consort, his rising family, and all his acquaintance, had good reason to desire that his life might have been prolonged, as a blessing to them, and a benefit to society. But the sovereign Lord of all has seen fit, for wise and holy reasons, to cut him down in the midst of his days and of his usefulness, by a sudden and unexpected stroke. And who knows but that his unexpected death may do more good to his friends and others, than his expected life could have done? God has often made use of sudden deaths to awaken sinners, and quicken saints, to attend to the things which belong to their everlasting peace. And it is worthy of particular remark, on the present occasion, that he has once and again made use of this method to pierce the hearts and awaken the attention of this bereaved family. About twenty-eight years ago, the father of the deceased expired alone in his field; and his sudden, unexpected death made a lasting if not a saving impression upon the mind of his eldest son, who has now left the world in a manner awfully, if not equally solemn and instructive. May this alarming instance of mortality be sanctified to us all, and especially to the near relatives and friends of the deceased! May we all "take heed, watch and pray," lest it should be our miserable lot to be hurried into eternity unprepared!

# SERMON III.

## DEATH WITHOUT ORDER.

FUNERAL OF MR. DANIEL THURSTON, WHO DIED NOVEMBER 7, 1802, AGED 54.

WITHOUT any order. — JOB, x. 22.

WHILE Job was under the bereaving hand of God, his thoughts were naturally turned upon the frailty of man, the shortness of life, and the gloomy scenes of mortality. He considered death as fast approaching, to cut off all his earthly prospects, and to remove his body to the dreary grave, from which he should never return. "Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order." This last circumstance of death struck his mind with peculiar force. It had come into his numerous family with the greatest appearance of irregularity. It had taken the servants and left the master; it had taken the children and left the parents; and it appeared to be approaching to put a period to his own life, in the midst of his days. He could see no order in such instances of mortality, which led him to conclude that God meant to discover no order, in calling mankind from the stage of life. Though he does not mention the hand of God in reducing the body to dust, yet it appears from what he had before observed, that he viewed death as under the divine direction. Upon hearing of the death of his servants and children, he immediately acknowledged the hand of God in his bereavement. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." According to this humble and sub-

missive expression, his meaning in the text cannot be that death is really without any order, but only that it appears so in the view of short-sighted creatures. This then is the plain and interesting truth which he meant to express, and which we are to consider on the present occasion:

That God discovers no order in calling men out of the world by death.

To illustrate this serious observation, it will be proper to show in the first place, that God does call men out of the world without any discernible order; and then inquire why he discovers no order in this important event.

I. I am to show that God discovers no order in sending death among mankind. Job believed, and we have reason to believe, that there is perfect order in the divine mind, respecting death, as well as every other event. He acknowledged before God, that he had limited the life of man, and precisely fixed the time of his death. "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months is with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass: turn from him that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day." And with respect to himself he said, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." The names of all men stand in order in death's commission, together with all the circumstances of their leaving the world. God hath not left so important a change as death is, to the direction of chance, but determined every thing respecting it, in infinite wisdom. In relation to God, death is perfectly regular; but this regularity he has seen proper to conceal from the view of men. He has not been pleased to tell any person, when or where, or how he shall die. All we know concerning these things, we collect from the providence of God, which is, in this respect, a great deep, and past finding out. Though God has passed a sentence of mortality upon all mankind, yet he never discovers any order in the execution of it. For,

1. He sends death without any apparent respect to age. There is no stage of life, from infancy to old age, in which God does not call some of the human race out of time into eternity. This is taught us by every grave-yard. There we may see that God pays no respect to days, or weeks, or months, or years, in destroying the hopes and lives of men. Nothing can be more irregular than the dates of death. There is not the least order in the congregations of the dead. They exhibit as great a diversity of ages, as the congregations of the living. God appears to have no regard to the length of life, in putting a period to it. He cuts off multitudes in infancy, before they have arrived at childhood. He cuts off multitudes in child-

hood, before they have arrived at manhood. He cuts off multitudes in manhood, before they have arrived at three-score years and ten. He is so absolutely sovereign in the disposal of life, that we are always uncertain how long the aged shall live, or how soon the young shall die. Hence we can never discover the order of death, by the order of age.

2. God takes men out of the world, without any apparent regard to their bodily strength or weakness. There is almost an infinite variety in the frame and contexture of their bodily constitutions. Some are formed strong, and vigorous, and healthy; while others are continually weak, and frail, and sickly. But though we are ready to mark out the latter for an early death, and the former for a long life, yet God discovers no such order in executing the sentence of mortality. This affecting thought deeply impressed the heart of Job, who expresses it with peculiar force and tenderness. "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure." The strong often fall into the grave before the weak, and the healthy before the sickly. When God sends death into a city, or a society, or a family, he discovers no order in respect to the strength or weakness of those whom he lays in the dust.

3. God brings men to their end without any apparent respect to the place of their dying. No place is too grand or too mean, too public or too private, too sacred or too profane, for death to enter. Death enters the palaces of princes and the cottages of peasants. Death enters the houses of feasting and the houses of prayer. Death meets men at home and abroad, on the land and on the sea, where they meet for amusement, or retire for devotion. No place is sacred to life, and secure from death. Though men generally desire and expect to die in one place rather than another, yet God often counteracts their desires, and disappoints their expectations. He fixes the bounds of life which they cannot pass, and appoints the place of death which they cannot avoid. He causes some to die where they were born, some where they had spent the most of their days, and some where they never had resided, nor had thoughts of residing. Many are so unhappy as to die strangers in a strange land, where they have no opportunity of conversing with their friends, and of giving and receiving the last tokens of love and respect. The living never know where they shall finish the course of life, and lay their bodies in the dust.

4. There is no order apparent in the means of death. God connects means and ends together; and as he appoints when

and where all shall die, so he appoints all the means to bring them to their end. These are extremely numerous and various. Who can enumerate all the casualties and all the diseases which have been or which may be the means of mortality? God may commission the moth or the mote, the air or the earth, or any of the elements, in their turn, to destroy the lives of men. But in all the means of death he discovers no order. Those who expect to die by one disease may die by another. Those who fear the iron weapon may fall by the bow of steel. Those who imagine they shall certainly die by the decays of nature, may eventually perish by the hand of the assassin. The arrows of death are continually flying in all directions, without the least appearance of order; and none can foresee whether their lives shall be cut off by the pestilence which walketh in darkness, or by the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

5. God pays no visible regard to the characters of men, in calling them off the stage of life. The wise and learned, the pious and useful, are as much exposed to the stroke of death, as those of the lowest capacities and of the loosest characters. "We see that wise men die, likewise the fool and brutish person perish." How many amiable children and youth are cut down like morning flowers, and disappoint all the hopes and dependence which had been placed upon them! How many men come upon the stage of life with shining talents and benevolent purposes, and yet are called out of the world in the midst of rising prospects and extensive usefulness! God takes away, without any visible distinction, "the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honorable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator." Though virtue, religion, learning, and all the interests of mankind, unitedly plead in favor of such amiable and useful characters, yet they are just as liable as the meanest of the human race, to fall by the stroke of death.

6. God appears to pay no regard to the circumstances of men, in putting an end to their days. Those who are surrounded with all that their hearts can desire are no more secure from death than the poorest and most miserable wretches who move upon the earth. The rich and the poor meet together in the grave. The rich man as well as Lazarus died. Those who spend their days in ease and affluence, go down to the grave as suddenly and unexpectedly as other men. Death pays no more respect to the rich and great, than to the poor, and mean, and miserable. He cannot be awed by power, nor bribed by wealth. "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves

in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; —that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations. Nevertheless man being in honor abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish." Death lays his irresistible hand upon the high or the low, the rich or the poor, exactly according to his divine commission. I may add,

7. God does not appear to consult the feelings of men, in calling them to leave the world. They have very different feelings in the view of this great and interesting event. Some are weary of the cares, and trials, and labors of life, and long for death to dismiss them from these tiresome scenes. Others are fond of the world and of the things of the world, and dread nothing so much as the approach of death. But though God perfectly knows all the hopes and fears of men with respect to dying, yet he pays no regard to their different feelings. He often leaves those to labor and suffer, who are wishing and waiting for the grave; while he sends death to seize others who are fond of living, and feel quite too happy and too busy to die. In a word, God discovers no order in calling men out of the world. As he gave them life, so he takes it away at his pleasure, without discovering any rule by which he governs this important part of his conduct. This leads us to show,

II. Why God sends death through the world without any discernible order.

He has, indeed, a fixed order in his own mind, according to which he calls every person from the stage of life; and this order he might have made known to our dying world. But he is pleased to keep this, like many other of his purposes, entirely to himself. And though we cannot discover all the reasons of his holding mankind in profound ignorance of the time and other circumstances of dying, yet we may mention some, which appear very obvious, and sufficient to justify him in this instance of his particular providence.

1. God may discover no order in death, to make men sensible that he can do what he pleases, *without their aid or instrumentality*. He often employs them as visible instruments of accomplishing the designs of his providence and grace. And in some cases, their agency appears more conspicuous than his own; so that their conduct is observed and admired, while his is overlooked and disregarded. But to convince the world, that all human agents are dependent on himself, and that what he can do with them, he can do without them, he often throws them aside, or lays them in the dust, at the very time when they sup-

pose themselves, or are supposed by others, to be the most useful and necessary. Though men would make usefulness the law of mortality, yet God makes this no rule in preserving or destroying their lives. He can let his enemies live, and take away the lives of his friends, at any time, in any place, in any situation, and in any crisis, however apparently critical and important. And by thus holding all his instruments in his sovereign hand, and preserving or destroying them at his pleasure, he exhibits his own power, wisdom and sovereignty; and, at the same time, sets the folly, and weakness, and dependence of all human agents, in the most clear and instructive light. To answer this purpose, he says, he raised up and destroyed the king of Assyria. "Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and upon Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?" It becomes the great Governor of the world, to make men feel their dependence and his supremacy. And to produce this conviction in the minds of the wise, and prudent, and mighty, nothing can be better adapted than to let them all know that, though they are gods, they shall die like men, and that he can carry on his own designs without their counsels or exertions.

2. God may conceal the order of death from the view of mortals, to make them know and feel that he can do what he pleases with them; or dispose of them and all their interests, for time and eternity, according to the counsel of his own will. As all the interests of men depend upon life, so God by disposing of life, necessarily disposes of all their interests, for time and eternity. And by thus holding them tenants at will, he clearly shows them that they have nothing which they can call their own, for one future moment. Had he only let them know when, or where, or how he would call for his own, they would have felt themselves independent and secure, till the certain period of death arrived. But by discovering no order in dying, he holds them all in constant suspense, and doubtful expectation, and gives them an opportunity of doing what many would neglect, did they but know the limits of life. The uncertainty of dying creates a hope of living, and the hope of living animates men in all their pursuits. How many have been at the pains and expense of acquiring knowledge, or of accumulating property, or of cultivating fields, or of building houses, or of discharging the most arduous duties of public life, who would

have had no heart nor inclination to do such great and useful things, had they only known the number of their days!

The irregularity of death, or the total uncertainty of the time, and place, and manner of its coming, gives God an opportunity to overrule all the prospects and purposes of men, in subserviency to his own wise and holy designs. He means to make men, whether willing or unwilling, the instruments of promoting his own glory; and to answer this important purpose, he wisely holds their lives in constant suspense.

3. God may discover no order in death, to convince mankind that they can do nothing without him. The uncertain approach of death spreads uncertainty over all human hopes, expectations and designs. Men may appoint, but death may disappoint. Hence all mankind are obliged, in point of prudence as well as of duty, to ask God's leave whether they shall go to any particular place, or accomplish any particular purpose. For it is only if the Lord will, that they shall live, and do this or that. Without divine preservation and direction, they can do nothing. The young have no ground to depend upon themselves, nor the aged upon the young. The strong have no ground to depend upon themselves, nor the weak upon the strong. Uncertain death destroys all ground of dependence upon those whose breath is in their nostrils, and whose lives are in the sovereign hand of God. Hence that seasonable and solemn admonition of the Psalmist: "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth: in that very day his thoughts perish." By not knowing the order of death, the child cannot afford his presence and aid to his dying parent, nor the parent afford his presence and aid to his dying child. The friend cannot succor his friend in distress, nor the dearest relatives mutually comfort and relieve each other. The uncertainty of death throws all the world into the hands of God, and is suited to make them realize a truth which they are so unwilling to believe and feel, that they are but the clay, and God is the potter. I may add,

4. God undoubtedly designs, by concealing the order of death, to teach mankind the propriety and importance of being constantly prepared for it. This mode of conduct is wisely and mercifully calculated to make dying creatures feel and act like dying creatures. Were they acquainted with the order of death, many would be more disposed than they now are, to put far away the evil day, and be less concerned about meeting the king of terrors. But now when they all stand upon a level in respect to dying, and they know not who shall be called first, or last, they are loudly admonished to take care of

themselves, and live in constant preparation for an event so infinitely interesting to themselves, and to all with whom they are connected. They have no ground to boast of to-morrow, and postpone a preparation for death till a more convenient season. Every instance of mortality is like the boy at Philip's ear, bidding them to be also ready. By sending death without any order, God solemnly calls upon all men, in all circumstances, to set their souls in order, and stand prepared to meet Death who is on his way to call them out of time into eternity.

It now remains to improve the subject.

1. Does God act as a wise and holy sovereign in destroying the bodies of sinners? and will he not act as a wise and holy sovereign in destroying their souls? Do we see him actually execute the sentence of temporal death? and shall we not believe that he will as infallibly execute the sentence of eternal death? Does he not appear to consult his own glory, rather than the feelings of sinners, in stripping them of all their worldly pleasures and enjoyments, and in consigning their bodies to the dreary grave? And can we suppose that he will pay any more regard to their hopes and fears, in appointing their portion among the miserable spirits in prison? Though he knows that death is the king of terrors to the wicked, yet he does not exempt them from its fatal stroke. He plainly tells them, that if they abuse his patience, kindness, and mercy in this world, it will aggravate their future and eternal misery. There is an inseparable connection between the first and second death of sinners. The day of their decease is the day of their destruction. The moment they go into eternity, they lift up their eyes in torment. Who can hear what God himself says to dying and despairing sinners, and yet entertain the least gleam of hope that they will find mercy beyond the grave? "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you: Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

2. If neither the word nor providence of God discovers any order in death, it is extremely unwise and dangerous to observe any order in preparing for eternity. But multitudes of our mortal race are guilty of this dangerous presumption. They

place some in the rank of the living, and some in the rank of the dying. And though they expect to die, and intend to prepare for death, yet they imagine they may safely neglect, till age, infirmity, or sickness place them in the rank of the dying. This is the order in which thousands and thousands resolve to prepare for eternity; and it is next to impossible to convince them of the folly and danger of their presumption. If the young are admonished to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and to prepare for the hour of death, they despise the admonition as altogether impertinent and unseasonable. In their apprehension, it belongs in order to the aged, and not to the youth, to prepare for their approaching dissolution. They verily think the time will come, when order and propriety will require them to prepare for their great and last change; but for the present, "they only wish, as duteous sons, their fathers were more wise." The same presumption will not allow the strong and the healthy, the rich and the prosperous, to number their days aright, and apply their hearts to wisdom. In their view, order requires the weak and infirm, the poor and the impatient of life, to consider and prepare for their latter end. They mean to prepare to leave this agreeable and delightful world, in a future, more proper, and more convenient season. Though death be without any order, yet they resolve to observe order in preparing to meet it. But is not this the most dangerous and criminal folly in dying creatures, who are liable every moment to be called into eternity? How can they be so unwise and stupid as to imagine that death will obey them rather than God? How can they hope to prosper, while they are hardening themselves against the Almighty? God solemnly forewarns such delaying sinners, that he will surely disappoint their presumptuous hopes and resolutions. "Judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand."

3. If death is coming to all men, and coming without any order, then it equally concerns all to live a holy and religious life. Every one of the living is constantly walking on the side of the grave, and knows not but the next step he takes will fix him in eternity. It is, therefore, extremely dangerous for any individual in this dying world, to remain a single moment in a state of nature, which is a state of alienation from God. Death may come in a day, or an hour, totally unexpected; and should it come unexpectedly to the unholy and impenitent, it would completely destroy them; for there is no offer of mercy, or space of repentance, beyond the grave. Those who live in

impenitence and unbelief are as much exposed to the death of the soul, as to the death of the body; and did they only realize their exposedness to temporal death, they would equally realize their danger of eternal destruction. A holy and penitent heart lays the only foundation for a safe and peaceful death. Nothing can support a rational and immortal soul in the near and full view of eternity, but a well-grounded hope of the everlasting favor and enjoyment of God. Who will deny that religion is infinitely important to one, as well as another, in a dying hour? When a violent and mortal disorder seized the man whose remains are before us, how much did he need a pious preparation for a future and blessed immortality? And who, whether young or old, whether rich or poor, whether strong or weak, can place themselves in the same trying situation, without feeling the solemn importance of making their peace with God, and securing the salvation of their souls? Since every one is going the way of all the earth, it equally concerns every one, to walk in that strait and narrow path, which leads to everlasting life.

4. If God discovers no order in death, then he discovers no order in life. As he gives us no reason for his taking away the lives of some, so he gives us no reason for his preserving the lives of others. In both cases, he equally acts as an absolute and incomprehensible sovereign. Many, however, seem to suppose that they can discover plain and important reasons for his conduct towards the living, though they cannot account for his conduct towards the dead. They imagine that youth, and health, and strength, and usefulness, are the reasons of their being preserved, while others have fallen around them on every side. But all these reasons once plead as powerfully in favor of the dead, as they now do in favor of the living. Who, therefore, can tell why one infant is left, while another is taken? or why one man in high health and activity is spared, while another is cut down? or why one amiable and useful character is allowed to live, while another no less amiable and useful is laid in the grave? The oldest person on earth cannot give a reason why he did not die in infancy, or in childhood, or in any period or circumstance of life in which others have died. The living are a wonder to themselves. They can assign no reason why they have not before now, been numbered with the dead. They are the monuments of God's sparing, distinguishing and sovereign mercy. It is because he is God, and not man, that he has preserved them amidst the arrows of death, which have been continually flying around them. And as their past preservation has been entirely owing to the sovereign mercy of God, so they have nothing to secure

them another moment from death, but the same sovereign mercy which has hitherto supported them in life. O may this thought sink deeply into all our hearts, and effectually deter us from abusing the patience and forbearance of God, who carries our lives, and all our interests for time and eternity, in his holy and sovereign hand.

5. Since God discovers no order in death, it becomes the bereaved and afflicted on this mournful occasion, to submit to his holy and absolute sovereignty. This is the only ground of submission under your present bereavement. God has called away the deceased without any order and without any warning. And though he saw reasons sufficient for cutting him down by a sudden and unexpected stroke, in the midst of his days, yet he has not discovered those reasons to you, and hence you have no right to say unto him, "What doest thou?" You ought to be dumb, and not open your mouths, because he knew what was best, and has done what is right. When God acts as a sovereign, he means that his creatures should submit to his sovereignty. Though he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, yet he often throws them into the furnace of affliction on purpose to bring them to the most sincere and unreserved submission to his will. This is your situation, who are called to endure a sudden, unexpected, and sore bereavement. God knows the darkness and distress in which you are involved; but yet he requires you to believe that he has treated both you and him you lament, according to infinite wisdom and goodness. And it is only in the belief and love of this truth, that you can enjoy any peace and consolation in your present affliction. If you either overlook or oppose the amiable and awful sovereignty of God so clearly displayed in your bereavement, you will increase your sorrows and aggravate your guilt. But if you sincerely submit to his will, and cast your burdens upon his arm, he will give you that peace which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away. The loss of a husband, the loss of a father, the loss of a son, and the loss of a brother, may be more than made up, by the enjoyment of God. But it is only in the exercise of faith, and love, and entire submission to God, that in his light you can see light, and find rest to your souls, in the view of the sudden and solemn instance of mortality which you are called to lament. Be entreated, then, to draw near to God, that he may draw near to you, and give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Finally, this subject, and this occasion, unitedly admonish all to prepare without delay for their great and last change. Our eyes and our ears teach us that death is without any order,

and may come as suddenly and unexpectedly to one as to another. Though it is probable that some here present will live many days, and arrive at old age, yet it is no less probable that some here present will die, not many years, not many months, not many days hence. It would be far from strange, if some individual who is called to attend this striking instance of mortality, should stand next on death's commission, and be the very first to follow the deceased into eternity. And this may justly excite each individual to cry with deep sensibility, "Lord, is it I?" The youth who imagines he is far from the grave, may be the next to be covered with the clods of the valley. The man who is boasting of to-morrow, and disdaining the fear of death, may be the next to moulder in the dust. And either of the mourners may suddenly and unexpectedly follow the deceased into that eternal state, from which he will never return. Week after week, death has come among us without any order. And why has God given us these repeated warnings and admonitions? Is it not because there are many who have despised and abused all other warnings and admonitions, and still totally neglect to prepare for eternity? This may be one of the last solemn calls that God will ever condescend to give to some poor, stupid, impenitent creatures, who stand upon slippery places, and whose feet will soon slide into the grave. God's spirit will not always strive, nor his patience always last, with those who hate instruction and despise reproof. Can any of this character realize that death is without any order, and yet give sleep to their eyes, or slumber to their eye-lids, until they have made their peace with God, and are prepared to meet and conquer the king of terrors? Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. To-day, therefore, if ye will hear the voice of God in his word and in his providence, harden not your hearts. Amen.

# SERMON IV.

## BURDENS CAST UPON GOD.

DEATH OF DR. ABIJAH EVERETT, JANUARY 2, 1804, IN HIS 48TH YEAR.

CAST thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. — PSALM lv. 22.

DEATH is one of the most fruitful sources of sorrow in this evil world. It not only carries terror and distress to the dying, but plants daggers in the breasts of the living. It has produced more tears and sincere sighs than any other calamity which has fallen upon the children of men. Every instance of mortality causes a smaller or larger circle of sorrow. The living are continually lamenting the dead, and a large portion of mankind are every where exhibiting the signals of bereavement and mourning. "Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." But God who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, is abundantly able to heal the wounds which he gives. There is always a remedy for every mourner, and this remedy is pointed out in our text. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." To set this gracious declaration in a plain and practical light, I shall,

I. Show what we are to understand by burdens.

II. Show what is implied in men's casting their burdens upon the Lord.

III. Make it appear that God will sustain those who cast their burdens upon him.

I. Let us consider what we are to understand by burdens.

A burden properly signifies a load; and to carry a load is always more or less tiresome, and sometimes extremely distress-

ing. A burden, therefore, is a very proper figure to represent any thing which is disagreeable, painful, or afflictive. In this figurative sense the word burden is used in the text, and in various other places of scripture, as well as in common discourse. When we speak of any natural evils which have fallen upon ourselves or others, we very commonly call them burdens. By this metaphor, we are to understand all natural evils, whether of body or of mind. Wounds, bruises, diseases, and every species of sickness, may be properly called bodily evils; but bereavements, disappointments, and all the marks of divine displeasure, may more properly be termed mental evils. These two kinds of natural evil are intimately connected, and very frequently enhance each other. Pains of the body are painful to the mind, and pains of the mind are sometimes painful and even destructive to the body. These bodily and mental evils are more in number than can be reckoned up; but many of them are so short in duration, and so easy to be borne, that we never consider them as burdens. As we hardly perceive the weight of those things that we daily carry about with us, so we scarcely take notice of the light and common evils of life. But there are severe pains and sicknesses, and severe losses and bereavements, which are properly called burdens, and which greatly abound in this evil and sinful world. Men are here born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. How often are their bodies racked with pain! How often are their eyes filled with tears! How often do their bosoms heave with sighs! How often are they called, in a sudden and unexpected manner, to part with their nearest and dearest friends! These are heavy burdens, too heavy for them to bear, without divine support and consolation. Even Job himself was ready to sink under the bereaving strokes of providence. He cried out in the anguish of his heart, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me!" When God visits any with sore and sudden bereavements, he causes their hearts to stoop, and constrains them to feel the propriety and importance of casting their burdens upon him. This leads me to show,

II. What it is for the afflicted to cast their burdens upon the Lord. This implies various exercises of the mind.

1. It implies a realizing sense that God has laid their burdens upon them. They must know the rod, and him who hath appointed it, in order to know where to cast their burdens. All afflictions come from God, and are marks of his just displeasure. Though they flow from love, yet they flow from that love which frowns upon sin. No affliction is for the present joyous, but grievous; and God does not grieve mankind to express his

love of complacency. It is the expression of his displeasure, which gives the heaviest weight to the heaviest affliction. There is nothing which is capable of giving so much anguish and distress to the human heart, as a realizing sense of the just displeasure of the greatest and best of beings. And when the afflicted realize the frowns of God under his bereaving hand, they are fully convinced of the necessity of going to him, and casting their burdens upon his arm. But,

2. They cannot do this without acknowledging that God has a right to lay their burdens upon them. God is the sovereign Lord of all his creatures, and always has a right to lay such burdens upon them as he sees best. He has a right to lay a burden upon one and not upon another, and to lay a heavier burden upon one than upon another, without assigning any reason for such a disparity in the dispensations of his providence. He giveth not account of any of his matters; and none may say unto him, what doest thou? He sees through all the relations and connections of things, and knows how to lay burdens upon his creatures in the most proper time, and in the most proper degree and duration. Infinite wisdom cannot err, and perfect goodness cannot injure; the judge of all the earth cannot but do right. This men must believe, in order to cast their burdens upon the Lord. For if he should injure them by any burdens which he lays upon them, the injury could not be removed by any created being, nor even by himself. If he should take off an unwise or unjust burden, this would not repair the injury; or if he should grant a good to the person, greater than the unjust evil he has inflicted upon him, this would not repair the injury. Were God to afflict any person more than he deserved, the person would always have reason to complain; and while he complained he could not cast his burden upon the Lord. The afflicted, therefore, must be fully convinced that God has a right to afflict them in the manner and measure he actually does, before they can be disposed to cast their burdens upon him. For,

3. This implies entire submission to the conduct of God, or a willingness to endure the burdens which he pleases to lay upon them. The prophet Micah speaks the proper language of one who is suffering under the correcting hand of God. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him; until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me." It is the perfect rectitude of God's conduct in afflicting mankind, which is the only proper ground of their entire submission. Since God always acts wisely and justly in laying burdens upon them, they always have reason to be submissive under his burdens, and to bear them cheerfully. So Job felt and said

in the furnace of affliction. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." The Shunammite felt and expressed the same spirit, under the bereaving hand of God. When she was interrogated, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?" she replied, "It is well." She was willing to bear the burden which God had laid upon her, even while she was seeking relief. And the afflicted always feel this spirit, before they cast their burdens upon the Lord. For,

4. This farther implies casting *themselves* upon the Lord, which is the essence of the duty enjoined in the text. Men cannot lay the burdens which they feel, upon God; nor can God take to himself the burdens which he lays upon them. He can, indeed, take calamities from one person, or one people, and lay the same sort of calamities upon another person, or another people; but he cannot take upon himself the natural evils which he inflicts upon any person, or people; and, therefore, no person nor people can literally cast their burdens upon God. But they can cast themselves upon the Lord, which will afford them immediate support and relief under their burdens. When the general of an army lays a heavy burden upon an obedient soldier, he may cast himself, and consequently his burden, upon the general, by saying, "Sir, this appears a burden too heavy for me to carry. But you know what is proper to lay upon me. I am your soldier; my strength and my life are at your disposal. It is your concern to improve my strength and my life for the public good. And if it be best that my strength should be exhausted, or my life sacrificed, at this time, by bearing this burden, I have nothing to say; I cheerfully submit." The soldier now casts his burden upon his general, to whom it wholly belongs to continue, or to lighten, or to remove, the burden. Just so the child of sorrow may go to his heavenly Father and say, "My burden is great, and it seems I must sink under it. But thou knowest what is best. I am in thy hand as the clay is in the hand of the potter. My strength and my life are entirely thine. It belongs to thee to do what thou wilt with thine own. If thy glory requires my strength to be exhausted, and my life to be sacrificed by suffering affliction, not my will, but thine be done." When the afflicted feel this spirit, and thus carry themselves with all their sorrows to God, they do in the most becoming manner cast their burdens upon him. Thus Eli cast himself and his burdens upon the Lord. When Samuel told him what evils were coming upon him and upon his house, he said, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Let God glorify himself by me, either in life, or in death, and I am satisfied. In the same manner Da-

vid cast his burdens upon the Lord. "Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him." I refer it entirely to God, to continue, or to lighten, or to remove, my burdens. Christ taught this duty to all his disciples in a state of suffering. "Take no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And in the view of his own tremendous sufferings, he cast himself and his sorrows upon his Father. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The apostle Peter directs suffering christians to feel and conduct in the same manner. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." And the apostle Paul not only enjoins this duty upon christians, but describes the manner of performing it. "Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." When the afflicted thus go to God, and wholly resign themselves up to his care and disposal, they then cast their cares and burdens upon him, in the manner he requires.

It only remains to show,

III. What evidence there is that he will sustain them.

Here it may be observed,

1. There is ground to believe that God will sustain those who cast their burdens upon him, because he laid their burdens upon them to show their weakness, and make them take hold of his strength. It is only if need be, that he afflicts any of mankind; and when the afflictions he sends have answered their purpose, he is ready to relieve the afflicted. He told his ancient people that he would afflict them, on purpose to bring them to a due sense of their dependence upon him. "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." This end, which God proposed in afflicting his people, the prophet tells us was completely answered, by bringing them to cast their burdens upon him. "Come, say they, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." As soon as the afflicted cast their burdens upon God, he is always ready to sustain them. As soon as Peter, when sinking in the waves, lifted up his eyes and his heart to Christ, and cried for mercy, the compassionate Saviour granted him immediate support. As soon as Abraham had completely bowed his will to the will of God, and in his heart had offered up his son, God appeared for his relief, and removed his heavy burden. God

is always ready to sustain the weak and distressed, when they are willing to take hold of his supporting hand. He always knows when the afflicted really desire his gracious support, and then he is always willing to sustain them, by lightening their burdens, or giving them strength according to the weight and duration of their trials.

2. Those who cast their burdens upon the Lord are properly prepared to receive divine support and consolation. While they carry their own burdens, they murmur and repine, which renders them incapable of deriving support from God. They refuse to be comforted. They contend with their Maker, who is stronger than they, and provoke him to continue and increase their burdens. Pharaoh was obstinate and incorrigible under divine corrections. He chose to bear his own burdens, and refused to submit to the hand that chastised him. This provoked God to increase his burdens, until they sunk him in perdition. While the afflicted feel and act like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, or a wild bull in a net, they are in a situation which forbids God to appear for them, and puts them out of the reach of his aid and support. They cannot, at the same time, trust in themselves and lean upon God. But when they cease to contend with the Almighty, and cast their burdens upon him, then they are suitably prepared to receive divine consolation. When they feel weak, and weary, and heavy laden, and really lean upon the Lord, they immediately find rest and peace. All the perfections of God are a ground of support to those who cast their burdens upon him; and so long as they renounce all self-dependence, and trust in the Lord Jehovah, in whom there is everlasting strength, they will feel themselves strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

3. The glory of God requires him to support those who look to him for strength or relief under their burdens. He always glorifies himself by displaying his perfections in supporting, relieving, or defending his friends, who place their hopes and cast their burdens upon him. The scriptures abound with instances of his signal interpositions in favor of suffering saints. He appeared for Jacob when sinking in despondency, and turned his sorrows into joys. He strengthened and animated Elijah, in a season of peculiar darkness and distress. He gave faith and fortitude to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, which enabled them to maintain their religion and integrity, in opposition to all the power and malice of their enemies. He exerted his power and displayed his justice in favor of Daniel, and gave him a complete victory and triumph over those who sought his life. And the apostle gives us a long catalogue of

the ancient patriarchs whom God supported in affliction, protected in danger, and relieved in distress. In these and all other instances of the kind, God glorified himself by sustaining and comforting those who confided in his power and goodness. His past is a pledge of his future conduct. As he always has, so he always will, sustain the weak, the weary, and the afflicted, who cast their burdens upon him. I may add,

4. That God has promised to afford all proper support and relief to those who come to him with their cares and burdens, and place an unshaken confidence in his faithfulness. This is promised in the text. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." The prophet says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." The apostle James says, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." And the apostle Peter says, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." There is a multitude of similar promises, scattered all over the Bible. These particular promises are made upon particular conditions, and whenever the conditions are performed, the promises will certainly be performed. If the bereaved and afflicted only comply with the duty God has enjoined on them in particular, it is certain they shall find divine consolation and support. The faithfulness of God never did and never can fail. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?" Indeed, a firm faith in the divine promises is one of the means, by which God immediately comforts and supports those who trust in him and cast their burdens upon him. Hence it is absolutely certain that, if the bereaved and burdened perform the condition in the text, they shall eventually be sustained and comforted.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God will sustain those who cast their burdens upon him, then burdens may become the means of great good. Men are naturally prone, in prosperity, to forget and forsake God; to imagine they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; to trust in their own hearts and lean to their own understanding; and to say unto God, depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. While they are in such a state of self-sufficiency and independence, they are deaf to the calls, and warnings, and admonitions, of the word and providence of God, and stand exposed to all the snares and temptations of this present evil world. There is nothing, therefore, better adapted to prevent these fatal effects of prosperity

than adversity, which is calculated to make men feel the necessity and importance of returning to God, from whom they have unwisely and sinfully departed. And though bereavements and afflictions of every kind are marks of the divine displeasure, yet they are the means which God often uses to promote the spiritual and eternal good of the children of men. By laying heavy burdens upon sinners, he has, in a great many instances, prepared them for his special grace. And, by laying heavy burdens upon his own children, he has often promoted their spiritual benefit and growth in grace. Indeed, the apostle tells us that he treats all his children in this manner, to express his tender regard for their highest welfare. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Farthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he, for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby." Afflictions always produce these salutary effects, when they bring the children of God to feel their dependence upon him, and to cast themselves upon his mercy. And hence they have often seen and acknowledged the goodness of God to them, in calling them to endure afflictions and fiery trials. David says, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." And again he says, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now I have kept thy word." When afflictions make good men feel their dependence upon God, and bring them to stay themselves upon him, they ought to consider them as the fruits of his fatherly love.

2. If God will sustain those who cast their burdens upon him, then the greatest burdens may become the most beneficial. The greatest burdens have the greatest tendency to draw men to God, and make them feel the necessity of looking to him for support and relief. None will go to God for support, so long as they feel able to support themselves. And they commonly feel sufficient to endure light and momentary afflictions, and therefore despise such chastenings of the Lord. But when he lays his hand heavily upon them, and takes away a friend or relative in whom their hearts were bound up, or calls them to suffer any other heavy and distressing calamity, then they feel their own weakness, and are ready to cry to God for

his help in a day of trouble. And if they really cast themselves upon his mercy, they are capable of receiving light, and strength, and comfort, in proportion to the weight and magnitude of their afflictions. "God giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." It is only when men are weak, that they can be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. The best of men in their lowest state, have frequently found the highest enjoyment in God. When Job was totally stripped of earthly comforts, and lay prostrate under the heaviest load of calamities, he cast his burdens upon the Lord, and found occasion to bless him for his frowns as well as for his smiles. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And David went to God, under a sense of his weakness, and cast his burdens upon him, in full confidence of obtaining all needful support and consolation. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." God has promised to those who cast their burdens upon him, that as their day is, so their strength shall be. And many christians, at this day, have experienced the faithfulness of God, in fulfilling this promise. They have found heavy burdens lighter to carry than light ones, and enjoyed more of God in the lowest state of adversity, than in the highest state of prosperity. It is, therefore, a consoling truth to the sorely afflicted, that the more their troubles increase and the longer they continue, the greater peace and consolation they may enjoy in God.

3. If God will sustain those who cast their burdens upon him, then the afflicted never have any reason to murmur or complain under the burdens which are laid upon them. This, however, is a complaining world, and all mankind are extremely prone to murmur under the afflicting hand of Providence. Cain complained that his punishment was greater than he could bear. The patriarch Jacob, when he supposed he was bereaved of one and of another of his favorite children, indulged and expressed hard and unbecoming thoughts of God. The children of Israel, while under the peculiar care and direction of the God of their fathers, spent and lost their lives by murmuring in the wilderness. And when the same people were carried into the land of their enemies, they became still more impatient, and boldly complained that the ways of God were

not equal. The afflicted are always in danger of complaining. But they never have any just ground of complaint. "Why should a living man complain?" None ever have endured greater evils or calamities than they have deserved at the hands of God. Besides, God always stands ready to support and relieve them, if they will only become reconciled to him, and cast their cares and burdens upon him. Their complaints only serve to hide God's face from them, and justly provoke him to continue and increase their burdens. While they fight against God, they have abundant reason to expect that he will add affliction to affliction, until they are either relieved or destroyed. They ought to remember therefore that none ever hardened themselves against God and prospered.

4. If God will sustain those who cast their burdens upon him, then the afflicted never ought to faint and sink under the weight of their burdens. There is a strong propensity in mankind, first to despise the chastening of the Lord, next to complain of it, and finally to become faint and weary of his corrections. Light troubles they despise, and overlook the hand of God in them. Heavy afflictions they are constrained to ascribe to God, and while they cannot but feel the weight of his hand, their hearts naturally rise in opposition to his wise and holy dispensations. But after they have despised and opposed God in his providence, and found no relief, they then naturally sink under the rod, and despair of relief. But what occasion have any to faint and sink under their burdens, while God is both able and willing to sustain them, if they will only cast their burdens upon him, and take hold of his strength? It would be very unreasonable in a child to faint under a burden which his parent has laid upon him, when he might be assisted and supported any moment, if he would only apply to his father for relief. And it is no less unreasonable and undutiful in a child of God, to faint and sink under his afflictions, while his heavenly Father is constantly saying to him, Cast thy burden upon me, and I will sustain thee. Hence God forbids every one of his children to faint in the day of adversity. "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction:" nor, as the apostle expresses it, "faint when thou art rebuked of him." The afflicted cannot faint and sink under the heaviest burdens, without distrusting and displeasing God. When Elijah sunk into gloom and despondence, God rebuked him for his conduct. And God is always displeased with the afflicted, when instead of casting their burdens upon him, and thus deriving the light and comfort which he is ready to afford them, they give themselves up to grief and despair, through an evil heart of unbelief.

5. If the afflicted ought to cast their burdens upon the Lord, then it highly concerns them to call upon his name. Prayer is the proper way of unbosoming themselves to God, of making known their wants and desires to him, and of casting their cares upon him. Hence he expressly enjoins this duty upon them. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." And the apostle James says to christians, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." David tells us in the context, that he resolved to call upon God with full confidence that he would hear and relieve him. "As for me, I will call upon God: and the Lord shall save me. Evening and morning, and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice." David's confidence arose from his experience; he had often prayed, and been heard in times of trouble. He relates a striking instance of this kind, in the hundred and sixteenth psalm. "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. I was brought low, and he helped me." When the afflicted are truly resigned to the will of God, they are prepared to draw near to him, and to ask for the supports and consolations of his spirit. They have the spirit of grace and supplication, and find a pleasure in giving themselves unto prayer. Jacob wrestled with God in his troubles, and prevailed; and God has never said to the seed of Jacob seek ye me in vain. The afflicted, above all men, ought to pray without ceasing, without doubting, and without fainting. Let the experience and exhortation of the Psalmist excite them to constancy and perseverance in effectual, fervent prayer. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait I say on the Lord."

Now, may these things make a due impression upon the minds of all who have been smitten of God and afflicted. This number is undoubtedly large; for few, if any, have entirely escaped the rod of his wrath. Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. This life is one continued scene of trial to all the children of men, from the cradle to the grave. But there is one here present, whose wounds are bleeding, and whose tears are flowing. She has, in the course of the last week, suddenly and unexpectedly lost the object which lay nearest to her heart, and which was the firmest foundation of her earthly hopes and prospects. Though Doctor EVERETT had a slender constitution, and usually enjoyed but a small

share of health, yet the morning before he died, there were no visible nor sensible symptoms of the near approach of death. Neither he, nor his friends, had the least apprehension of the danger he was in, but a few hours before he breathed his last. God hath poured a full and bitter cup of the wormwood and the gall, for the disconsolate widow. He has bereaved her of her husband in the midst of his days, without allowing either her or him the desirable opportunity of preparing their minds for the parting stroke. This painful circumstance, while it increases her burden, diminishes her fortitude and strength to support it. She may, with more than common propriety, cry, "Have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me." But let her seriously consider, that her bereavement, with all its aggravating circumstances, was ordered by Him who cannot err, and who doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. The Judge of all the earth has, in this, as well as in every other instance of his conduct towards her, done right. Let her not murmur and repine, but cheerfully submit to the sovereign will of God. Let her commit herself and her fatherless children into his holy and gracious hand. He has promised to be the father of the fatherless, and the widow's God. If she will only cast her burdens upon him, he will sustain her, and make this light affliction, which is but for a moment, work for her a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Amen.

# SERMON V.

## BENEFIT OF AFFLICTIONS.

DEATH OF CAPTAIN AMOS HAWES, JANUARY 18, 1804, IN HIS 43RD YEAR.

I AM the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit. — ISAIAH, xlviii. 17

IT belongs to God to govern the moral as well as the natural world. He is able not only to order all the outward circumstances of mankind, but to govern all their views and feelings, in every situation in which they are placed. He can make all the objects with which they are surrounded, and all the scenes through which they pass, produce just such effects in their minds as he sees best. He can blast prosperity, and bless adversity. This is a ground of consolation to the afflicted, who ought to desire that God would make their afflictions instructive and beneficial. But God knows that they are often slow of heart to believe that he is either able or willing to give such an issue to their troubles. It was while his own people were in a state of adversity, and despairing of relief, that he undertook to comfort them, by reminding them of his power over them, his relation to them, and his tender regard for their spiritual good. "Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my called; I am he; I am the first: I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens. Come ye near unto me, hear ye this. Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, which teacheth thee to profit." We find no intimation here that God would put an end to the afflictions of his people, but only that he was able to sanctify them, or cause them to have a salutary and desirable effect. This then is the truth which the text naturally suggests, and which will be the leading sentiment in the present discourse.

It is a consolation to the children of God, that he can make their afflictions profitable to them. I shall,

I. Show that afflictions may be profitable to the children of God.

II. That he is able to make them profitable to his children.

III. That this is a matter of consolation to them.

I. Let us consider, that afflictions may be profitable to the children of God.

No affliction is for the present joyous, but grievous. All men naturally dread calamities. Our Saviour's heart recoiled at the prospect of his approaching sufferings. The righteous as well as the wicked look upon afflictions as real evils, from which they always wish either to be exempted, or delivered. But notwithstanding the painful nature of afflictions, they may eventually prove very beneficial to the children of God, in various respects.

1. They may be greatly instrumental in turning off their attention from the world. While they live in the world, they are obliged to attend to worldly objects, and their duty often leads them into danger. They insensibly suffer the cares, concerns and enjoyments of the world to engage too much of their attention, and divert them from more noble and more important objects. They are prone to mind earthly things, and to become worldly-minded. But afflictions have a direct tendency to turn off their eyes from beholding vanity. When pains, or sickness, or disappointments, or bereavements, fall upon them, the glory, the beauty, and the importance, of the world all vanish, and more serious and interesting objects absorb their attention. Adversity turned off the mind of Job from all the scenes and prospects of living, and fixed his whole attention upon the serious subject of dying. The loss of his substance, the loss of his servants, and especially the loss of his children, threw him into the dust, and constrained him to say, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." More common and moderate afflictions checked Solomon in his career of glory, and made him exclaim in the bitterness of his soul, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Let men be ever so much absorbed in the pursuits and enjoyments of the world, heavy and repeated strokes of adversity never fail to withdraw their attention from such vain and momentary objects. Let the young or the old, the rich or the poor, the high or the low, the righteous or the wicked, be brought into severe affliction, and they will, for a season at least, turn their backs upon the world, and appear to pay no regard to those earthly concerns and pursuits, to which they had been before awake and alive. Here then we see one way,

in which afflictions may be profitable to the godly. They may turn off their too great and too constant attention from the low and trifling concerns of the present life, and prepare them to attend to things of everlasting consequence.

2. Afflictions may turn off their *affections* as well as their attention from the captivating objects of the world. They would not mind worldly things too much, if they did not love the world more than it deserves. But their attention may be diverted from the world, while their undue love to it remains. They never ought to love the world for what it is in itself, or give it the first place in their hearts; because this is totally inconsistent with that supreme love and regard which they owe to God. So our Saviour taught his disciples. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." And the apostle John represents supreme love to the world, as totally inconsistent with true love to God. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." While the children of God live in the world, they are constantly exposed to imbibe the spirit of the world, and place their hearts upon worldly objects, which are unworthy of their supreme affection. In this sinful and dangerous state of mind, they stand in peculiar need of divine corrections, which have a direct tendency to detach their affections from lying vanities which cannot profit. When God disappoints their worldly hopes, or bereaves them of the objects which they had been idolizing, they are constrained to see the vanity of the world, and to feel their obligations to withdraw their affections and dependence from it. In the time of affliction they find that the world has nothing in it to soothe and comfort their wounded hearts. It serves to increase, rather than diminish their sorrows. They cannot but hate it as the worst of enemies, which has so often deceived them, and robbed them of superior happiness. In this respect, afflictions may be of great advantage to the children of God. Besides,

3. They may be of much greater benefit to them, by raising their affections to God, the source of all good. When afflictions have turned off their attention and affections from the world, they directly point them to God. By taking away every other ground of dependence and consolation, they may be said to drive them to the fountain of all good. When David had been plunged in the depths of sorrow and distress, he felt constrained to return to God for relief. He said, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." The prophet Habakkuk resolved that when the fruits of the earth and the enjoyments of the world

should fail, "he would rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation." Saints always set their affections either upon things below, or upon things above; and when their affections are taken off from things below, they never fail to set them upon things above, where God is, and where Christ, and their richest treasures are. And whenever afflictions draw the attention and affections of the children of God from the world, and fix them upon heavenly and divine objects, then they become in the highest degree beneficial. They completely answer the gracious design of God, and serve at once both to display his glory, and promote the good of his people. This leads us to consider,

II. That God is able, in all cases, to make afflictions produce the good effects which have been mentioned. He says to every one of his children, in the text, "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit." You are ready to imagine, in your melancholy moments, that the evils I have brought upon you can never do you any good, and if you abuse them, and sorrow only after a worldly sort, they will really work your ruin. But I the Lord your God am able to teach you how to improve them to your spiritual and everlasting benefit. I can cause you to learn those things by your sufferings, which you could not have learned by any other means, and which you will have reason to be thankful for, both in this life and in that which is to come. But in order to illustrate the truth of this gracious declaration, it may be proper to observe two things.

1. That God is able to bring himself into the view of his afflicted children. He is the first and the last, the greatest and the best of all beings. He is the creator, preserver, and owner of the universe. He possesses the most amiable, glorious, and awful perfections. He is eternal, immutable, independent, almighty, all-wise, and infinitely holy, just, and good. His eye looks into every heart; his hand supports and directs every creature; his presence fills every place; his holiness abhors every sin; his benevolence commiserates every submissive child of sorrow; and his justice frowns upon all the stupid, impatient and rebellious. A realizing sense of the immediate presence, and glory, and majesty of such a being must necessarily fill the mind, and shut out every other object. Now God is able thus to bow the heavens, and come down into the minds of the afflicted, and seize every power and faculty of their souls, and fix them entirely upon himself. Though they often feel a melancholy pleasure in pondering upon their own troubles, and complaining of this evil world, yet God can divert their attention, by drawing near to them, and causing them to realize his presence, greatness, and sovereignty. And

it is only in this way, that he can effectually turn off their attention from the scenes and objects of the world, because their minds must be fixed either upon himself, or upon his works. He may, indeed, turn their attention from one worldly object to another, without bringing himself into their view. But in order to take off their minds from all created objects, he must draw their attention to himself, and fix it upon his own great and glorious character. This he is able to do whenever he pleases, and as long as he pleases. He can make all times, and places, and circumstances, and objects, lead their minds to himself, so that they cannot see nor contemplate any object, without seeing and contemplating some or all of his perfections. He can make the whole world appear to be full of himself, and cause the afflicted to look upon all things as less than nothing and vanity, in comparison with the Lord their God, who has them in his hand as the clay is in the hands of the potter, and can dispose of them for time and eternity, according to his sovereign pleasure. But barely bringing himself into their view, and turning off their attention from all created objects, will not afford them any relief; because they may behold God, and be troubled. It is, therefore, necessary to observe,

2. That he can place their affections as well as attention upon himself. "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord." The hearts of all men are in his hand, and he can turn them, like the rivers of water, whithersoever he pleases. When he brings himself into the view of the afflicted, he can awaken every holy affection in their hearts, and give them the sensible enjoyment of himself, which is far better than the enjoyment of sons, or of daughters, or of any earthly good. After he has drawn the attention, he commonly draws the hearts of his children to himself. This appears from a variety of instances, recorded in scripture. God gave Job a most realizing sense of his majesty and glory, and at the same time filled his soul with correspondent affections. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Such views of God, and such holy and devout affections towards him, effectually banished all his murmurs and complaints under his heavy afflictions. This he acknowledged before God. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no farther." The vision which Isaiah had of God, sitting on a throne high and lifted up, was attended with holy and humiliating feelings. And the manifestation of the divine glory on

the mount of transfiguration, filled the hearts of the disciples with holy joy and rapture. They could not bear to think of having their divine views and affections interrupted by any inferior objects. They said with the greatest sincerity and sensibility, "It is good for us to be here." God is always able not only to give his afflicted children a lively view of his own glory, but also to give them the spirit of adoption, and make them love him as their father, their friend, and their supreme portion. After David had been repining at the ways of providence, God cured him of his hard thoughts, by giving him a realizing and joyful view of himself. While he beheld and loved God, he could say with the highest satisfaction, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee?" Thus God is able to draw off the attention and affections of his afflicted people from all earthly objects, by causing them to see and converse with him in his providence, and enjoy the tokens of his favor. This is his high prerogative. It belongs to him alone, to produce such effects in the hearts of the afflicted, and teach them to profit by their painful trials. Men cannot teach one another to profit, either in prosperity or adversity; because it is out of their power to give one another a realizing sense of God, or to excite holy affections towards him. But he is able to make all things work together for good to his afflicted children. And now,

III. They ought to consider this as a sufficient ground of consolation. So he tells every one of them in the text. "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit." By declaring himself to be their God, he assures them that he is both able and ready to heal the wounds which he hath given them, and make their outward afflictions the means of spiritual light and consolation. For his covenant faithfulness obliges him to consult their good, and employ all his perfections, in the course of his providence, to promote it. When he became the God of Abraham, he said, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." And he says the same thing, in substance, to every one with whom he enters into covenant. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." It is a solid foundation of comfort to all the children of God, under their severest trials and afflictions, that he bears a covenant relation to them, and has engaged to treat them as children. They may always be assured, that all his dispensations towards them are the genuine expressions of his fatherly care and kindness, by which he means to teach them to profit. But, besides his acknowledging his relation to them in their afflictions, as their God, he has expressly promised to

correct them in mercy, and for their real benefit. We read, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." We read, "Happy is the man whom God correcteth: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is: hear it, and know thou it for thy good." And the apostle comforted the primitive christians with the consideration that their light afflictions, which were but for a moment, should work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. It is not necessary that the children of God should know that their afflictions shall be removed or diminished. They may exercise faith, and confidence, and patience, and submission, and even joy, while they know that the Lord is their God, and will certainly teach them to profit by those things which would otherwise sink them in sorrow and despair.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since God makes use of afflictions to keep his children near to him, it appears that they are extremely prone to forsake him. Were they naturally disposed to live in nearness to and communion with God, he would have no occasion to use such harsh and disagreeable means to prevent them from wandering, or to reclaim them from it. He does not grieve nor afflict them willingly, but only because they will not regard his milder means of instruction. This he often assigned as the reason of his chastising his ancient backsliding and incorrigible people. When he threatened to chastise Jeshurun, he told him it was because he had waxen fat and kicked, and forsaken God who made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. When he threatened to chastise David, he told him how much he had given him, and how much more he would have given him, if he had only been grateful and obedient under the smiles of his providence. He told his people by the mouth of David, that he regretted the necessity of punishing them. "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways. I should have fed them with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied them." And he sometimes said he punished them because he knew no other way to reclaim them. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets: I have slain them by the words of my mouth." And he held the same

language to them by the prophet Jeremiah. "They refuse to know me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; behold I will melt them, and try them: for how shall I do with the daughter of my people?" And again he says, "I spoke unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This has been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice." God would never chastise his children, if they were not bent to backsliding, and did not refuse to be drawn with the cords of a man, with the bands of love. His using the rod of correction so often, therefore, plainly manifests that they love to wander from him, and are extremely unwilling to return. It is a certain sign that a child is very undutiful and disobedient, if nothing but repeated and severe corrections will restrain, or reclaim him. The children of God, therefore, have abundant reason to lament that they so greatly abuse his mercies, and so often refuse to be reclaimed by any milder method than the rod of his wrath.

2. It appears from the manner in which God instructs and benefits his afflicted children, that they may derive the greatest advantage from their severest sufferings. Light and ordinary troubles often do them more hurt than good, and only serve to interrupt their peace, or turn their attention and affections from one worldly object to another. But great and heavy afflictions never fail under a divine influence, to shake the foundation of all their earthly hopes and enjoyments, and to make them feel the necessity of relying upon God alone for real and permanent happiness. It is only in this way that afflictions ever become truly beneficial to the children of God; and in this way, the greatest trials and troubles have the greatest tendency to promote their spiritual benefit. The righteous flourish like the palm-tree; they grow the fastest, under their heaviest burdens. The ancient patriarchs never made swifter advances in holiness, nor appeared to more advantage, than while they were enduring the severest trials. The faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, the submission of David, and the constancy of Daniel, were the happy fruits of their great and singular sufferings. The apostles and primitive christians never would have lived such holy and heavenly lives, had they not been effectually weaned from the world by a continual load of afflictions. It was greatly owing to the tribulations they endured, that they had their conversation in heaven, and looked not at the things that are seen, which are temporal, but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal. God employs the same means at this day to refine and purify the vessels of mercy. And the oftener he puts them into the furnace of affliction, and the longer he continues them there, the brighter he means to

bring them out. He means to teach them, by experience, the vanity of the world, and the superior happiness which results from the view and enjoyment of himself. They may always, therefore, humbly and confidently reckon that the heaviest afflictions which they are called to endure, are not worthy to be compared to the spiritual benefits which shall eventually flow from them.

3. If God chastises his children for their good, and teaches them to profit under his correcting hand, then those who are suffered to live in uninterrupted prosperity, have reason to fear that they do not belong to the household of faith. Good men have observed, and sometimes complained, that God pours into the bosom of the wicked the largest portion of his temporal favors. While Job was suffering adversity, he stumbled at the prosperity of the openly vile and ungrateful. "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly." Again he inquires, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them." David prayed, "Arise O Lord, deliver my soul from the wicked —from men of the world, who have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure." And he owns, "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not troubled as other men, neither are they plagued as other men." God often suffers his enemies to pass with impunity in this life, and even loads them with benefits, to give them an opportunity of acting out the corruption of their hearts, and of preparing themselves for final ruin. And agreeably to this, the wise man observes, "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." In the view of these passages and of this subject, the prosperous have reason to fear that they are receiving their whole portion in this life. They are certainly destitute, according to the apostle, of one peculiar mark of the children of God. For he expressly says to professing christians, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." All professors of religion, and those who entertain any hope of their gracious state, ought seriously to inquire whether their hearts are right with God, and whether he has not been granting them their requests for outward prosperity, and sending leanness into their souls.

4. If God can make afflictions profitable to his children, then we may justly conclude that he can make them profitable to

others. Though sinners hate instruction and despise reproof, yet they are not beyond the reach of divine power and divine grace. God is as able to afflict them as to afflict saints; and when he afflicts them, he can teach them to profit under the weight of his hand, and under a sense of his displeasure. He can make them realize the vanity of the world, and effectually turn off their attention and affections from it. He can bring himself into their view, though they say unto him, depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. He can slay the enmity of their hearts, and make them accept the punishment of their iniquity. He can shed abroad his love in their hearts, and bow their wills to his own. He can cause them to loath themselves for all their past stupidity, ingratitude, unbelief, and obstinacy. He can give them the spirit of adoption, and make them feel every filial affection. It is, therefore, just as easy for God to make afflictions beneficial to sinners as to saints. And it is no uncommon thing for God to take sinners into the school of affliction, and teach them saving knowledge. He took this method to awaken, convince and convert one of the most cruel, hardened and obstinate sinners, who had corrupted the hearts and destroyed the lives of multitudes. But "when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." How often has God made sinners to profit by the death of their friends, or the dissolution of near and dear connections! How often have unfaithful parents been brought to know and discharge their duty, by the death of their children! How often have undutiful children been taught to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, by the loss of their parents! And how often have graceless brothers and sisters been prepared for living and for dying, by being called to follow one another to the grave! In times of general security, we find more sinners awakened and convinced by afflictions, than by any other means used with them. How often does God send death into a family, to promote the salvation of one or more of its members! And how often does he arrest the chief of sinners, in their career of iniquity, by some sudden, unexpected, and distressing calamity! God can melt the hardest heart, or bow the most stubborn will, in the furnace of affliction. And after sinners have remained stupid and incorrigible under a series of difficulties, dangers, disappointments, and common troubles, how often does he melt them and try them, for their spiritual and everlasting good! So that, in all cases, there is more ground to hope that the afflicted will derive spiritual benefit

from their affliction, than that the prosperous will derive spiritual benefit from their prosperity.

5. Does God teach his children to profit under his fatherly chastisements? Then it appears that every person may know whether he belongs to his family or not. Afflictions are peculiar trials of the heart, and give men the best opportunity to determine what is in reality the supreme object of their affections. God gave Satan leave to afflict Job, for the express purpose of determining whether his love to him was sincere and supreme; and Satan did not ask for a more plain and infallible criterion. And God took the same method to demonstrate the faith and friendship of Abraham. It is written, "that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am: And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." This severe and singular trial gave Abraham a fair opportunity of proving to himself and to the world, that he loved God more than Isaac, or than any other earthly object. And after he had actually yielded a cheerful and unreserved submission to this extraordinary injunction, God declared him to be his sincere friend. "And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." God also takes the same method to try the hearts of his enemies, which he takes to try the hearts of his friends. We read that he led his rebellious people forty years in the wilderness, to prove them, and to know what was in their hearts. When he afflicts either saints or sinners, he means to try their hearts, whether they love the creature more than the Creator. The afflicted always find a struggle in their hearts between God and the world; for they are constrained to fly to one or another of these sources of consolation. If they love the world supremely, they will place all their hopes and expectations upon it; but if they love God supremely, they will renounce the world, and look to him alone for relief. It is only under afflictions, that men can clearly determine how much they depend either upon God, or the world. Then they have a happy opportunity of learning where their treasures are, whether in heaven, or on earth; for where their treasure is, there will their heart certainly be, when any of their earthly hopes and prospects are cut off. If under such circumstances, they do not discover their own hearts, it must be entirely owing to criminal blindness. If they have the spirit of children, they will feel the spirit of adoption towards their heavenly Father. They will go to him for all

necessary support and consolation, and rest satisfied with his holy and wise disposal. But if they have not the spirit of adoption, they will murmur, and complain of God, that he lays his hand so heavily upon them. Now, as all men have been more or less afflicted, and many suppose that they have had a large share of suffering, they may all know whether they are really friends or foes to God. Let them only look back upon their conduct and feelings under divine corrections, and they may easily determine, whether they have felt and acted as a filial spirit would have dictated. Have they found that it has been good for them that they have been afflicted? Have they found that afflictions have really weaned them from the world, and led them to God, in whom they enjoyed that peace which the world cannot give, nor the world take away? All good men have derived such benefits from affliction; and those who have not found any benefit from the trials they have endured, have reason to fear that they have never become the children of God. Let every man judge his own heart, and let no man deceive himself.

6. It appears from all that has been said in this discourse, that the afflicted ought to be of a teachable spirit under divine corrections. Their hearts should be tender, and disposed to hearken to the voice of God in his providence. "If ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." He takes particular notice of the feelings of those who are under his chastising hand. He is highly displeased, if they will not hear his voice, nor feel his strokes. He complains of Jacob, that though he had "poured upon him the fury of his anger, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart." But he was pleased with the tender heart and teachable spirit of Ephraim under the rod of correction. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." When the afflicted feel and express such a filial spirit, they appear amiable in the sight of God, who pities them, as a father pitieth his children. He is always willing to teach those who are willing to be taught in the school of affliction. Indeed, he brings them into this school for this very purpose. It is, therefore, no less their wisdom than their duty to desire to be taught. They enjoy a privilege which the prosperous do not enjoy, and which they themselves would not have enjoyed, had not God been pleased to take the most painful and most effectual method to teach them that which it is of the highest consequence to learn.

May this thought sink deeply into the minds of those in particular, who have been called, in the course of the last week, to suffer a sore and unexpected bereavement. Each of the mourners has sustained a heavy loss. The disconsolate widow has sorrow upon sorrow. Before she has dried up her tears for the loss of her brother, she is called to mourn the death of her dear, kind and tender husband, upon whom all her earthly hopes were placed. God is now reading her lesson after lesson upon the frailty of life, the vanity of the world, and the uncertainty of all temporal enjoyments. If she will only incline her ear unto God, and hear him speaking to her by the voice of his providence, he will certainly teach her to profit by her great and complicated afflictions. It is a trying season, in which she has an opportunity of gaining spiritual and everlasting benefit. Let her draw near to God, and he will draw near to her. Let her commit herself to his care, and stay herself upon his arm, and he will keep her in perfect peace.

The bereaved parents have received a deep and lasting wound, which they will probably carry to the grave with them. Their deceased son had discovered so many amiable qualities, and treated them with so much tenderness and respect, that he had gained their strongest affection and highest confidence. They had fondly expected that he would have taken care of them under the decays of nature, and administered to their comfort to the close of life. But by one stroke of his hand, God has destroyed their raised expectations, and plunged them into the depths of sorrow. They are now ready to say, "all these things are against us, and will bring down our gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." But let them reflect, that God is able to teach them to profit; and if they will only bow in cordial submission to his sovereignty, he will give them light in darkness, and joy in sorrow, and be better to them than the enjoyment of the dear son, whom he has torn from their hearts.

The bereaved brothers and sisters are loudly admonished, not to boast of to-morrow; for they know not what a day may bring forth. God has made breach after breach in their family; and they know not which of their names stands next in death's commission. Their days are already numbered, and may be shortly and unexpectedly finished. The death they deplore speaks louder than words, and bids them remember that neither health, nor strength, nor agreeable manners, nor brilliant talents, can guard them against the pestilence which walketh in darkness, or the destruction which wasteth at noonday. O that God would teach them so to number their days, that they may apply their hearts to wisdom, and prepare for

their great and last change. Then they will have reason to say that it has been good for them that they have been afflicted, and savingly instructed.

Let us all, my hearers, lay to heart the late instance of mortality. It is a solemn and instructive one to this whole people. Every individual feels sensibly affected by it. What other man could have been taken away, who would have been so universally missed in this town, as Captain HAWES? His sprightly powers of mind, and his easy, familiar way of conversing, rendered him agreeable in all circles, and naturally attracted public attention. He was early employed, and much esteemed, as a teacher of children and youth. He was called to do almost every kind of public business, not only for individuals, but for every society with which he was connected. The records of this town will transmit his name, and exhibit marks of his peculiar talents, to future generations. His death must make a deep impression, not only upon his weeping relatives, and numerous connections, but upon this people, who will, in so many ways, and in so many places, meet with memorials of his life. Let us all awake from our stupidity, and hear this solemn admonition of Providence, to attend to the things which belong to our everlasting peace, before the door of mercy is shut. Amen.

# SERMON VI.

## HAPPY DEATH.

FUNERAL OF MRS. LYDIA FISK, WIFE OF REV. ELISHA FISK, OF WRENTHAM, JULY 13, 1805.

AND I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them. — REV. xiv. 13.

THE beloved apostle tells us, in the beginning of this chapter, that he was favored with a vision of heaven and of its holy and happy inhabitants. He saw the Lamb of God standing on Mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And he heard the voice of harpers, harping with their harps; and singing as it were a new song before the throne, which none could learn but the hundred forty and four thousand, who were redeemed from the earth. After receiving this clear and full view of the blessed state of departed saints, he is divinely directed to write what he had seen, and assure living christians that their death should put a final period to all the evils of the present life, and immediately convey them to everlasting rest. "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." This last clause of the verse gives the reason why those who die in the Lord are blessed. It is because, "from henceforth," that is, from the moment of death, they enter into heaven, where God is, and where Christ is, and where all holy beings will finally meet, and be completely happy. The text suggests two things for our serious consideration.

I. What it is to die in the Lord.

II. Why those who die in the Lord are blessed.

I. Let us consider what it is to die in the Lord.

This mode of expression signifies the same thing that the apostle Paul meant, when, speaking of Andronicus and Junia, he said, "who were also in Christ before me." All men are naturally in a state of alienation from God, and cannot be said "to be in the Lord," until they become reconciled to God, united to Christ by faith, and entitled to eternal life. But here it seems proper to be a little more particular, and to observe,

1. That to die in the Lord implies dying in a full and realizing belief of the being and perfections of God. There is a natural propensity in mankind to disbelieve the existence of him who made, upholds, and governs the universe. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." There is reason to fear that multitudes in this land of light, live all their days in a state of practical infidelity, and never realize the existence and perfections of the Deity. But those who live without faith, must die without hope. None, therefore, can die in the Lord, unless they awake from their natural stupidity, and realize that there is a great and holy God, who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and who will reward or punish them in a future state, according to their works. Such a belief is prior to and the foundation of all preparation for the service and enjoyment of God. Hence says the apostle, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." It is easy for God to awaken the most thoughtless and secure, either in health, or in sickness, or on a dying bed, to realize his being, his holiness, his justice, and awful sovereignty in having mercy on whom he will have mercy. But while they remain under the power and dominion of an unholy heart, such a view of the being and perfections of their Creator fills their souls with nothing but enmity, anxiety, and distress. They cannot bear the thought of living, or dying, under the just displeasure of a sin-hating and sin-revenging God. But the sovereign Lord of life has a right to call those who are in this deplorable situation out of time into eternity; and there is great reason to believe that he has often seen fit to exercise this right, since so many have apparently died without submission and without hope. This leads me to observe,

2. That dying in the Lord implies dying in the love, as well as in the belief of God. Though God be infinitely amiable in himself, and though awakened and convinced sinners see him to be worthy of their supreme affection, yet they cannot entertain the least thought of dying in the Lord, while they sensibly

feel their hearts rising in opposition to his great and amiable character. This is often felt by those who lie on a sick or dying bed; but so long as they feel this, death looks as terrible as eternal destruction, and appears to be inseparably connected with it. They are conscious of the moral impossibility of their enjoying God, either in this life or the life to come, without a moral conformity to his moral image. They have a clear conviction that they must love God for what he is in himself, and be pleased not only with his goodness and grace, but with his justice and sovereignty, before they can be truly happy in any part of the universe. But as soon as they renounce their enmity, and become heartily reconciled to God, then they may be said to be in God and God in them. For "he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Such a union of heart to God is one thing essentially necessary to prepare men to go into his immediate presence, and to be forever happy in the contemplation of his glory.

3. To die in the Lord implies love to Christ, and entire dependence on him for pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. Love to God is previous to love to Christ, and lays the only proper foundation for it. This appears from his own declaration in the sixth of John. "Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." True faith in Christ springs from love to the true character of God, which Christ loved, and displayed by his sufferings on the cross. Those who love God, love Christ for loving God, and opening the door of mercy to sinners. It is only for Christ's sake, that God can consistently receive the penitent and broken-hearted. But when these look to God for forgiveness by faith in Christ, they are justified freely by his grace, and entitled to eternal life. To believe in Christ is to be in Christ, and to be in Christ is to be in the Lord, and to be in the Lord is to be prepared to die in the Lord. Faith in Christ disarms death of its sting and the grave of its terrors. This the apostles and primitive christians knew by happy experience. Hence they could say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Though all who are united to Christ and accepted of God, are really in the Lord, and shall die in safety, yet is proper to observe still farther,

4. That to die in the Lord, in the full sense of the text, implies dying in a lively and well-founded hope of the favor of God, and the enjoyment of heaven. As God knows that his children stand in peculiar need of light and comfort in a dying hour, so he often manifests himself unto them as he does not

to the world, gives them the spirit of adoption, and opens to their view a joyful prospect of the holiness and happiness of the kingdom of glory. We find many instances of this kind recorded in scripture, for the consolation of his friends in the close of life. He seems to have given David such divine views and feelings when he said, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." "Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." Paul experienced the same hope and confidence, under a lively view of future and invisible realities. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." It was a proverb in Israel, "The righteous hath hope in his death." And it has often been seen since, "in what peace a christian may die." Many pious souls have smiled in death, and with joy unspeakable and full of glory bid adieu to the world, and taken possession of the inheritance of the saints in light. Those, therefore, who expire in a clear view, in an ardent desire, and a well-grounded hope, of the joys of heaven, do most eminently and visibly die in the Lord.

II. Let us now consider why those who die in the Lord are blessed. And here the first thing that occurs is,

1. Because they have a solid foundation to die in peace. This is peculiar to them, in distinction from all the rest of mankind. How many millions of the human race have found all their hopes perish in the near prospect of the grave, and the scenes that lie beyond it! Death is commonly the king of terrors to such as are not prepared to leave the world, and sometimes to those who are. The pains of the body are often much less distressing, at the hour of dissolution, than the fears of death, and the awful apprehensions of an opening eternity. It is indeed a fearful thing for the wicked to see themselves falling into the hands of the living God, who is about to pour out the vials of his wrath upon them without mixture and without end. But how happy are those who are satisfied with living, reconciled to dying, and longing for admission into the mansions of bliss! How happy were the patriarchs in their last moments, who, after finishing their weary pilgrimage, died in faith of future and eternal felicity beyond the grave! Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, left the world in peace. Moses died in the full prospect of the heavenly as well as earthly Canaan. The last words of David were, "God hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire." Good old Simeon said, in the view of his approaching decease, "Lord, now lettest thou

thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." Stephen being filled with the Holy Ghost, at the moment of death, "looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God," and expired with these words on his lips, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Paul's prospect of death was joyful and triumphant, when, looking back upon his past, and looking forward to his future life, he said, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Certainly it is much to be desired, then, to escape the terrors of the grave, and to enjoy peace and serenity of mind in the dark and trying hour of death; and this is very frequently the happy lot of those who die in the Lord.

2. Those who die in the Lord are blessed, because they immediately enter into the heavenly state. This is suggested in the text. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth." The moment they leave the world, they pass into glory. Enoch, Moses, and Elijah, were carried directly from earth to heaven. Lazarus was conducted by angels to Abraham's bosom. The poor penitent malefactor was raised from the cross to the paradise above. And all who have died in the Lord, have entered into that rest which is provided for the people of God. Were the souls of the righteous struck out of existence at death, or thrown into a state of total insensibility, they could not be said to be actually happy; but if they survive the body, and immediately ascend to heaven, then they must be immediately and unspeakably blessed.

For, first, they are completely released from all the sufferings of the present life. Here they were born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Here all the seasons and all the elements were armed against them. Here they suffered by innumerable pains, infirmities, and diseases of the body. Here they endured public calamities as well as personal afflictions. Here they were subjected to mental and manual labor and fatigue, from day to day and year to year, in every situation of life. Here they were called to fight the good fight of faith, and surmount ten thousand obstacles which were thrown in the way of their duty by themselves and others. Here they lived and died in a state which was designed and calculated to fill their eyes with tears, and wring their hearts with sorrow. But they shall never suffer, nor sigh, nor weep any more. No natural evil shall ever give them another painful sensation. They have arrived at a

perfect and perpetual rest from all the labors, sorrows and sufferings, which they once endured in this vale of tears. And this prepares them for the pure and positive enjoyments of heaven.

Secondly. They are freed from all moral, as well as natural evil. Their sinning as well as their suffering is come to a final period. Though they sincerely loved God and all their fellow creatures while they tabernacled in flesh, yet their holy and devout affections were often interrupted by the world and the things of the world, as well as by the great adversary of souls. But their pious and benevolent affections shall now roll on for ever, without the least interruption from any thing past or future. They shall feel perfectly right towards God, towards Christ, towards the Holy Ghost, towards angels, towards saints, and towards all the intelligent creation. There shall never exist in their breasts a single purpose, desire, or wish, that they would not be willing the whole universe should know. They will lay their hearts open to the perfect friendship of all the inhabitants of heaven, which will afford them the purest felicity that can be enjoyed by intelligent and holy beings. They will constantly feel and constantly express entire complacency in each other's character, situation and enjoyments, which will put every individual, as far as possible, into the possession of the whole happiness of heaven.

Thirdly. They will be united not only in their affections but in their happy employments. Though they will entirely rest from their past earthly labors and painful exertions, yet they will be continually employed in holy and devout exercises. The heavenly inhabitants are represented as in a state of perpetual activity. They rest not day nor night from praising him who sitteth on the throne, and him who died for them, and made them kings and priests unto God. Heaven is incessantly resounding with the prayers and praises which flow from the love and admiration of those who have safely reached the haven of everlasting rest.

Besides, fourthly, their happiness is greatly augmented by immediately reaching the perfection of their nature. In this world they were in a state of minority, where all their intellectual powers were restrained and obstructed in their growth and operation. But as soon as they throw off all the clogs and obstructions of the body, and leave this dark and cloudy world, their noble faculties will expand, and reach their proper vigor and maturity. Every natural and moral excellence which they possessed in this life will be carried to perfection in the next. Though every soul will not be equally great, equally good, and equally happy; yet each individual will be perfectly great,

perfectly good, and perfectly happy. The infant, the child, the youth, the man, the middle-aged, and the aged, will each arrive at the perfection of his nature, as soon as he first enters into the heavenly world, where no imperfection ever comes. This the apostle Paul, who was caught up into heaven, plainly represents as the state of the blessed. "We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." We are, in the present state, totally unacquainted with the maturity of human nature. We have never seen any mind brought to its natural or moral perfection. But those who die in the Lord, will immediately find their own perfection, and the perfection of others, who arrived before them to the mansions of the blessed. And when they have come to the perfection of their nature, and all the natural excellences are adorned with the beauty of holiness, how glorious must they appear! how happy must they be! What rapid advances must they make in divine knowledge and holy love, in the world of light! There is Adam, and Moses, and the prophets, and the apostles, and Christ himself, to pour instruction into their inquisitive and full-grown minds. There the history of God and of man will be completely laid open; and there will be nothing within, and nothing without, to divert their attention, or impede their progress in divine knowledge and divine enjoyments. Such abundant evidence do we find in the scriptures of truth, of the consummate blessedness of those who die in the Lord.

It now remains to close the subject, by some serious and suitable

REFLECTIONS.

1. What has been said, naturally leads us to reflect upon the absurdity, as well as criminality, of imbibing and propagating the principles of infidelity. Those who deny the existence of God, and reject the revelation of his will, destroy the only solid foundation of their own peace and comfort in the view of mortality. They know they must die and leave the world, like all other men. But while they persist in denying the being and the word of God, they plunge themselves in utter darkness respecting their existence and condition in a future state. It is the word of God only, which has brought life and immortality

to light; and when this light is once extinguished in the minds of any, they can find no rational ground of hope beyond the grave. It is out of their power to prove, either that they shall exist, or that they shall not exist, after death; and if they should exist, that their existence will afford them any happiness. They cannot prove that there is not another world, nor that the other world will not be a state of complete and endless misery. For, if they can exist in this world without a God, they may exist in another world without a God; and if they can suffer in this world without a God, they may suffer in another world without a God. The principles of atheists and infidels directly tend to take away every ray of hope in the hour of death. And the more learned, the more ingenious, the more reflecting they are, the more pain, anxiety and distress they may expect to feel, when death approaches and eternity opens to view. This has been found to be the case by the bitter experience of the most celebrated infidels, who lost all their hopes and sunk into despair, at the trying and awful hour of death, which has often filled the souls of pious believers with joy and triumph. If we believe that it is safe and happy to die in the Lord, then we must believe that to die without God, without Christ, and without hope, must be, of all things this side of eternity, the most painful and distressing to a rational and immortal mind. Infidelity never appears more absurd and shocking, than in contrast with the scenes of mortality. Who can wish to be an infidel, while he stands by a deceased saint, or a deceased sinner? Death is one of the most powerful antidotes against infidelity; and if any thing in this world can effectually convince unbelievers of the absurdity and criminality of their sentiments, it seems that a serious and contemplative view of the dying and the dead, must produce this desirable effect. If they have the least humanity, they must wish to see their fellow men die in peace, and to die in peace themselves. They must renounce either their principles, or all claim to tender and benevolent feelings. For nothing can be more cruel, than to destroy in their own minds and in the minds of others, every ground of hope in a dying hour. Let them no longer reject the counsel of God against themselves, but make it the business of their remaining days, to prepare themselves and others for a peaceful death and a blessed immortality.

2. It is a serious and weighty reflection suggested by this subject, that nothing will prepare men for death, but what will prepare them for heaven. It is the ardent wish of many to escape the wrath to come, though they have no desire to go to heaven, and dwell for ever in the presence of a holy God. These persons often imagine they are sincerely preparing for

death, while they are making no preparation for heaven. They live soberly, walk uprightly before men, frequently meditate on the shortness and uncertainty of life, read the word of God, observe the Sabbath strictly, call upon God in private and in secret, and perform every external duty which they find necessary to maintain peace of conscience, and banish the fears of death. But these are refuges of lies, which naturally tend to uttter disappointment and despair. Death will destroy every ground of hope, but that which is built upon a renovation of heart, and a cordial reconciliation to God. Our Saviour, who holds the keys of death and of hell, expressly said to those in his day who were strictly moral and externally religious, but destitute of internal holiness: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And, "if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Love to God, faith in Christ, and a sincere desire to glorify and enjoy God, are essential to a due preparation for death. No external duties, no selfish desires, no mercenary hopes of future happiness, will fit men for heaven; nothing short of holy love and purity of heart will prepare them to be absent from the body and present with the Lord.

3. This subject shows us how much those honor and support religion in the eyes of the world, who really and visibly die in the Lord. While they lie upon the confines of time and eternity, with sweet composure and serenity of mind, joyfully waiting for the happy moment to join the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven, they exhibit the most beautiful and instructive spectacle ever to be seen on earth. Their solemn and trying situation affords them the best opportunity of discovering to all around them the beauty, strength, and consoling power, of vital piety. The clear and lively prospect of eternity is one of the sweetest tests of the real views and feelings of expiring christians. The most hardened and stupid are constrained to acknowledge that that religion which removes the fears of death, and fills the soul with joy when nature is decaying and all earthly hopes are vanishing, must be a divine and important reality. Nothing strengthens the hopes of saints, and destroys the hopes of sinners, so much as beholding a sincere believer die in the full enjoyment of the peculiar supports and consolations of the gospel. The wicked are frequently more struck with a conviction of the reality and importance of religion, by seeing a saint die in serenity and joy, than by seeing one of their own character die in all the darkness and bitterness of despair. How beautiful and how important has religion often appeared in those who died in the Lord! How often has an expiring saint constrained sinners to

desire that they might die the death of the righteous, and that their last end might be like his! How calm, and serene, and instructive, were the deaths of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; of Joseph, Joshua and David! They called their families and friends around them, conversed freely with them, gave them their dying counsel, and closed their eyes in peace. These examples are recorded for the instruction and admonition of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Let them set their houses and their souls in order, and prepare to glorify God, do honor to religion, and give the finishing stroke to their character, by a calm, peaceful and instructive death. This will embalm their memories, and make them blessings to the world after they have left it.

Finally, the subject we have been contemplating affords matter of peculiar consolation to mourners, who have good evidence that their departed friends have died in the Lord. This consideration removes the heaviest part of bereavements; mixes light with darkness, and joy with sorrow. Though pious friends are the most amiable and valuable, and their lives are the most to be desired, yet their death is least to be regretted and lamented, if to be regretted and lamented at all. If they have left evidence of their dying in the Lord and entering into rest, their gain, their happy change, their present glory and felicity in the presence and enjoyment of God, ought to inspire the hearts of their surviving relatives with gratitude and joy, however great a loss they have suffered by the painful separation.

This consolation, we trust, the bereaved and afflicted pastor of this people has now a right to enjoy. Though God has been pleased, by a long, pining, painful sickness, to put an early period to the life of his dear consort, yet he has brought about this melancholy event under the most desirable and alleviating circumstances. He gave Mrs. Fisk time and opportunity, and apparently a heart, to prepare for a peaceful and happy death. While her body and her mind were sufficiently vigorous, though under the decays of nature, he arrested her attention by a sudden, clear and impressive view of his being, his character, and absolute sovereignty. Her fears were alarmed, her conscience was awakened, and she saw nothing before her but an awful and miserable eternity. In this distressing situation, he made her acquainted with the plague of her own heart, and fully convinced her that she was entirely in his hands, as the clay is in the hands of the potter, and that he had a good right to make her either a vessel of mercy or a vessel of wrath. But as her sense of danger, her conviction of

guilt, and her opposition to divine sovereignty, were very strong and sensible, so these exercises of mind were of short duration. God soon appeared for her, and turned her heart from enmity to love, from fear to hope, and from distress to joy. Next to those views and feelings, a happy calmness and tranquillity of mind succeeded, and generally continued, until her strength failed, and she hopefully fell asleep in Jesus. Her husband saw these marks of divine power and grace upon her heart, which are now suited to pour the balm of consolation into his wounded breast. He has abundant reason to be satisfied with every step God has taken, to separate lover and friend, and lay his acquaintance in the dust. Let him, with an eye of faith and hope, follow her into eternity, and view her as resting from all the labors, pains, infirmities and imperfections of mortality, as reaching the perfection of her nature, and as completely blessed in all the enjoyments of heaven; and these views of her joys will assuage his sorrows, and melt his heart into gratitude and submission. Since she honored God and religion by dying in the Lord, her example calls upon him to honor both, by walking softly before God, and manifesting a patient, quiet, filial spirit, under his correcting hand. And may the God of all grace and consolation give him that peace, which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away.

The particular relatives and friends of the deceased will notice the goodness as well as severity of God, in her early death. Though they may think there is some severity in his calling her so soon from the stage of life, yet they must acknowledge there is great apparent goodness in preparing her to depart in peace. They cannot sorrow as those who have no hope. And their hope that she is gone to rest may well suppress their tears, and soften their hearts to receive the instructions of providence. Whether they have hitherto improved or misimproved the day of grace, this bereavement bids them to be ready also. And O, that they may be wise, that they may understand this, that they may consider their latter end!

The church and congregation in this place are especially called upon to lay this instance of mortality to heart. Mrs. Fisk was placed in a conspicuous and important situation. Her dissolution was long expected, and in the course of her lingering and fatal disorder, she gave a peculiarly striking public evidence of the great change she experienced. She did every thing her state would permit, to manifest her love to God, to Christ, to his cause, and to his friends. She has left her dying

testimony in favor of the reality, the comfort, and the importance of religion. And she being dead, now speaketh to this people, with whom she was nearly connected, in a solemn though silent voice, and calls upon them to prepare to follow her not only into the grave, but into the kingdom of glory. Her voice is the voice of God, which it concerns the secure and the awakened, the young and the old, and the friends as well as enemies of Christ, to hear and obey. Since all must die, it is of infinite importance to all to prepare to die in the Lord. Now they have the opportunity to prepare; but to-morrow may be too late. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. And if ye will hear the voice of God in his word and providence, harden not your hearts.

# SERMON VII.

## THE SHORTENING OF HUMAN LIFE.

DEATH OF DEACON PETER WHITING, DECEMBER 9, 1805, IN HIS 60TH YEAR.

I AM deprived of the residue of my years. — ISAIAH, XXXVIII. 10

THESE are the words of Hezekiah, who was a man of strict integrity and extensive usefulness. We read, "Hezekiah began to reign when he was five and twenty years old, and he reigned nine and twenty years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done." This beautiful miniature of his character is followed by a more minute detail of his public services. He is represented as employing his power and influence, in repairing and purging the temple, in restoring the public worship of God to its former purity, in calling the whole kingdom together to keep the passover, and in bringing about a general reformation of religion. "And thus," says the inspired historian, "did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth, before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of the Lord, and in the law, and in the commandments to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered." But after he had done all these things, it pleased God to visit him with a severe disease, which immediately threatened him with the loss of life. And to increase his apprehensions, the prophet came to him, and in the name of the Lord admonished him to prepare for a dying hour. "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amos, came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order: for thou shalt die and not live." Such a solemn admonition deeply impressed his mind, and led him to call

upon God to remember him in mercy, and regard the sincerity of his heart. "Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." This prayer God graciously heard, and added fifteen years to his life. But though he recovered his health, yet he wished to retain some of those serious thoughts which passed in his mind, while he lay, in his own apprehension, on the borders of eternity; and for this purpose he committed them to writing. As he was hardly forty years old when he was taken sick and expected to die, so he deeply lamented being called off from the stage of action before he had reached even the meridian of life. "I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave. I am deprived of the residue of my years." Though for certain reasons God did not inflict this dreadful evil upon Hezekiah, yet for as good reasons he has inflicted it upon many others, from age to age. Accordingly, the words of the text naturally suggest this general observation:

That God deprives many of the human race of the residue of their years.

I shall first consider when God does this; and then inquire why he does it.

I. Let us consider when God deprives any of mankind of the residue of their years. The text and the doctrine suppose that he does not shorten the lives of all men, but allows some to live in the world until they have completely filled their days. It is, therefore, worthy of serious consideration when he does, properly speaking, diminish or curtail the lives of any of our dying race. Here I would observe,

1. That God deprives all those of the residue of their years, whom he calls out of the world before they have reached the limits of life which are to be found in scripture. Sacred history assures us, that the lives of men were once protracted to a much greater length than they are now, or have been for many ages past. About the time of Moses, the common period of life was reduced down to the short space of seventy or eighty years. Hence he says in his funeral psalm, "The days of our years are three-score years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be four-score years; yet is their strength, labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." This is generally the full measure of a useful life. Mankind often retain both their bodily and mental vigor till they are seventy years old, so as to be capable of serving both God and their generation with a good degree of activity and zeal. But after

this stage in life, they are commonly subject to those infirmities of body and mind which always destroy or weaken their active powers and faculties. Now, since the scripture allows mankind to extend their hopes of a useful life to the term of threescore years and ten, we may justly consider all those as deprived of the residue of their years, who die in infancy, or in childhood, or in youth, or in any period of life short of seventy. Hezekiah undoubtedly numbered his days according to this scriptural standard, when he expected to be deprived of the residue of his years. He had hoped to live as long as he could be useful in the world; but when he was told that he must die at forty, he regretted the loss of thirty years, which he had sincerely intended to employ in the service of God, and for the good of his people. And who is there now, in health, among the young and middle-aged, who does not desire, and in some measure expect, to reach that period of life, to which the scripture allows him to extend his hopes of living? Whenever, therefore, God sends death to any such person, he disappoints his hopes, and deprives him of the residue of his years.

2. God deprives all those of the residue of their years, whom he calls out of the world before they have reached the bounds of life fixed by providence. Though the scriptures limit life to seventy or eighty years, yet providence often extends it to a longer period. And the expectations of mankind are greatly governed by the ordinary course of providence. What God has done frequently, they very naturally expect he will do again. He has frequently lengthened out life to eighty-five, ninety, ninety-five, and even to a century of years. These limits of life are as firm a foundation of hope, as those which are fixed by scripture. As the young have a right to number their days by scripture, so the aged have a right to number their days by providence. Those who are eighty or ninety years old, have still ground to hope that God will lengthen their days, and give them to experience more of his goodness in the land of the living. There are some such aged persons now alive, who enjoy a large measure of health, of strength, and of activity, and have a fair prospect of living ten or twenty years longer. And should any of these be suddenly cut down by disease or accident, they would be deprived of the residue of their years, which they had anticipated, according to the course of divine providence in fixing the limits of life to the aged. It may be farther observed,

3. That even those are deprived of the residue of their days, who die before they have reached the bounds of life which are imposed by the laws of nature. Nature sets bounds to every kind of life in this world. By the laws of nature all vegetables

spring up, flourish, and increase to a certain degree, and then gradually decline, decay and die. And by the same regular operations of nature, all kinds of animals grow in strength, activity and magnitude, till they come to years of maturity, and gradually decay, and drop into the dust. Just so the laws of nature absolutely limit the lives of men. The seeds of mortality are implanted in their constitution. Their bodies must, according to a fixed law, return to the dust from which they were taken. All, therefore, who die by sickness, or accident, or violence, or any other cause than the course of nature, are really deprived of the residue of their days.

As we are not perfectly acquainted with the laws of nature, so we cannot absolutely determine that any of those who are dead did actually reach the natural bounds of life. We may, however, form some conjecture upon this subject, by the very few instances of those who have lived an hundred and twenty, or thirty, or forty, or fifty years. So far we know the course of nature may extend the bounds of life, and so far, perhaps, it would always extend the bounds of life, if it were not obstructed by either sickness, violence, or casualty. Hence we have great reason to conclude that God has most commonly deprived mankind of the residue of their years, and never allowed one in a thousand or a million of the human race to reach the bounds of life which nature has set. Let us now inquire,

II. Why God thus shortens the lives of men, and cuts off their expected years. Notwithstanding the sentence of mortality which he passed upon mankind in consequence of their first apostacy, he might have carried them all to old age, and brought them to the grave as a shock of corn fully ripe in its season. But as he has never done this in time past, so we have little reason to expect that he ever will do it in time to come. There is a strong probability, if not a moral certainty, that he will continue to sweep off myriads and myriads of mankind, before they have filled their days, and reached the natural bounds of life. Let us then seriously inquire why he deprives so many of our mortal race of the residue of their years, and suffers them not to enjoy a longer term to prepare themselves and others for their future and eternal state. Though his ways are above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts, yet we may discover some plain and important reasons for his executing the sentence of mortality in such a sovereign manner.

1. He may deprive men of the residue of their years, to teach the living that he is not dependent upon them in the least degree. Though he can and does employ them in his service, yet he can lay them aside whenever he pleases, and carry on

his designs without their aid or assistance. There are no children, nor youths, nor men, so promising or useful, but he can cut them down, and still accomplish his own purposes and promote his own glory, while they are sleeping in the dust. He undoubtedly threatened to call Hezekiah from the stage of life, in the midst of his days and of his usefulness, to teach him and others that he was not dependent upon his life or services, in order to fulfil the designs of his providence. And whenever he shortens the lives of his most faithful and useful servants here on earth, he proclaims by his conduct, that he has no farther service for them to do in this state of existence. This important truth he could not so clearly and sensibly impress upon the minds of men, if they were all permitted to fill their days, and leave the world by the course of nature. But when he cuts down so many in the morning of life, and in the midst of their most vigorous exertions and benevolent designs, he solemnly impresses that important truth upon all, which Eliphaz endeavored to impress upon Job: "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? Or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" God is a supreme, independent sovereign; and it becomes him to make all the inhabitants of the earth realize his sovereignty and independence, by giving them an ocular demonstration, that he can manage any of the concerns of this world, without their efforts or coöperation.

2. God may deprive men of the residue of their days, to teach mankind their constant and absolute dependence upon himself. They are extremely inclined to forget that they are supported and preserved, every moment, by his powerful visitation. And their forgetfulness arises in a great measure from the consideration of the general bounds of life, which scripture, providence and nature, have set. To these well-known periods they naturally extend their views, their desires, and their expectations. But to make them sensible that they still live, and move, and have their being, in himself, God continually deprives one, and another, and much the largest portion of mankind, of the residue of their years. He has not put them out of his own hand, by letting them know the utmost limits of life. Notwithstanding these limits, he has an absolute right to lengthen or shorten their lives, at his pleasure. They are just as liable to be cut down in any stage of life, as if there were no common boundaries fixed, beyond which they could not pass without a miracle. Though they have reason to believe that a few of mankind will live to three-score years and ten, and a fewer still arrive to eighty or ninety years, yet no individual in

the morning of life has any good ground to expect that he in particular shall be preserved to such an extraordinary age. It is computed that more than half of the human race are laid in the dust before they come upon the stage of action, and a very large proportion of the remainder are cut down in the midst of their days, and deprived of the residue of their years. God means to execute the sentence of mortality in such a sovereign manner, to make the living sensible of their constant and absolute dependence upon him, for life, and breath, and all things.

3. God may so frequently shorten the lives of men, to teach the living the necessity of being continually prepared for another life. He has plainly taught them in his word, that after death is the judgment; that after their present life expires, their future life will commence; and that as soon as their frail bodies drop into the dust from which they were taken, their incorruptible spirits must return to him who gave them, and exist for ever. Since their future life is as certain as their present, and infinitely more important, it highly concerns them to be always prepared for the day of death, and the eternal scenes that follow. But they are extremely apt to put far away the evil day, and cherish the inward thought that they shall still live for ever, and not see corruption; that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations. It is this fond and groundless hope of long life that leads thousands and millions of mankind to neglect the care of their souls and the things which belong to their everlasting peace, until their feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and the door of mercy is forever shut. To open their eyes and awaken their attention to the one thing needful, God so frequently and suddenly deprives persons of all characters and descriptions of the residue of their years. And it becomes him to use such solemn and powerful means to promote so important an end as the salvation of souls. He sends death into this, and that, and the other family, and cuts off those who expected to live, that their sudden decease may effectually teach others to prepare to follow them into the grave and eternity.

4. God may take away some before they have filled their days, to teach the living the importance of faithfully improving life as long as they enjoy it. All men are naturally slothful, and are strongly inclined to postpone present duties to a more convenient season. How many great and good things have multitudes intended to do, but never did them, because they were deprived of the residue of their years, upon which they presumptuously calculated! The designs which men form for futurity are some of the strongest motives they have for living. How many have ardently desired to recover from sickness, that

they might have time to perform those duties to God and man which they had long intended to perform, but had sinfully postponed and neglected! And how many slothful and negligent persons, after they found they must be deprived of the residue of their years, have not only lamented their past barrenness and unfruitfulness, but solemnly warned the living to be more active and diligent in the improvement of precious time! If men would only work while the day lasts, and improve their time to the best advantage, they might do a great deal for God, and the benefit of the world in a few years. Of this many instances might be mentioned. How much good was done by David, and Solomon, and Hezekiah, in the few years of their reign! How many great and wonderful things did Christ do, in the short space of his ministry! How laborious was Paul and every one of the apostles! and how much did they do, in a little time, to enlighten the world and enlarge the kingdom of Christ! It is of great importance that all men, whether in a public or private station, should make a wise and faithful improvement of life, while it lasts. And nothing can be better calculated to impress this truth upon their minds, than the conduct of God in depriving so many of the residue of their years. By this, he enforces the solemn admonition, which he has given to every one in his word. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

5. God may sometimes cut short the days of the wicked, to prevent their doing evil in time to come. He knows when any have devised evil, and intend to act like Hazael, in spreading misery and destruction all around them. In such cases he sometimes sees fit to cut down the workers of iniquity, and put a final period to their destructive influence in this world. It appears from scripture, that many such evil designing men have been judicially destroyed, just as they were upon the point of executing their malignant purposes. God disappointed the devices of Pharaoh and his hosts, so that their hands could not perform their enterprise, by plunging them in the mighty deep. David says, "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." Solomon says, "The years of the wicked shall be shortened." And to every one of this character he says again, "Be not over much wicked; neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time?" It is mercy to the righteous, and justice to the wicked, when God shortens their days, and puts it out of their power to injure the cause of truth, and destroy the temporal and eternal interests of mankind.

6. God may sometimes shorten the lives of his faithful ser-

vants, to prevent their seeing and suffering public calamities. It seems to have been in mercy to Hezekiah, that God added only fifteen years to his life, instead of fifty, which he might have added. Had his life been protracted to such a late period, he would have been involved in the dreadful evils which were coming upon both his family and kingdom. Hence he realized and acknowledged the goodness of God in delaying those judgments till after he should be removed from the world. "And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, hear the word of the Lord. Behold the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good if peace and truth be in my days?" When God is about to do his work, his strange work, and punish a corrupt and degenerate people, he often calls his children home, before he pours out the vials of his wrath in public calamities. Caleb, and Joshua, and the elders that outlived Joshua, were laid in the dust, before he visited his backsliding people with the marks of his severe displeasure. The prophet represents this as the usual mode of the divine conduct. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come."

It now remains to improve and apply the subject.

1. If God does not always deprive men of the residue of their years, but allows some to reach the bounds of nature, then there is a propriety in praying for the lives of the aged, as well as for the lives of the young. God may have as good reasons for prolonging the lives of the aged, as for prolonging the lives of infants, or children, or youths, or those in the midst of their days. Life is a blessing; and we may pray that this blessing may be continued to those who are in the possession of it. It is true, we have no right to pray that any person may live for ever, because we know that it is appointed to all men once to die; but since we never know that any living person has reached the bounds of nature, we may pray that his life may be still protracted, if it be consistent with the will of Heaven. Some of those who have passed the scripture bounds, and arrived to eighty or more than eighty years of age, appear as likely to live a number of years longer as ever they did, and may still desire and pray for the lengthening out of their days. And even the oldest persons living, though laboring under pains, infirmities and diseases, which seem to indicate the near approach of death, may yet pray for the removal or mitigation

of their bodily disorders, and a longer space of life. Some aged persons, when lying on a sick bed, tell their pious friends not to pray for their continuance in this world, but only for their preparation to leave it. This is entirely wrong. No person has a right to desire that God would deprive him of the residue of his years, or to ask another to pray for his death. Hezekiah was undoubtedly a good man, and fit to die; but when he was apprehensive of being deprived of the residue of his years, he turned his face to the wall, and earnestly prayed for the continuance of life; and his prayer was graciously heard and answered. God added fifteen years to his life. The living never know that they have lived long enough; this ought to be referred to the divine disposal. As we know not the bounds of nature, so we can never determine when a living man's appointed time to die is come. Thousands have been supposed to be struck with death, who afterwards recovered and lived many years. So long as there is life there is ground of hope, and so long as there is ground of hope there is ground to pray for the continuance of life. The will of the sick or the aged, in this case, is not the rule of duty, but the possibility of living. We ought always to pray that God would lengthen out our own lives, and the lives of others, as long as they can fulfil the designs of providence.

2. If God so often deprives men of the residue of their years, then it is extremely unreasonable and dangerous to flatter ourselves with the hopes of living a great while in the world. What ground have any to expect that their days will be greatly prolonged? Is it because the course of nature may carry them to a great age? This is a slender foundation of hope. God has a thousand ways of obstructing the course of nature, and curtailing the lives of men. Is it because they see some around them covered with gray hairs, and bending under the weight of years? How few is this number, in comparison with those who have come on the stage after them, and gone off the stage before them! Is it because they are young, and healthy, and ardently desire to live? How many thousands of this description has God cut down in the morning of life, and deprived of the residue of their years! What ground has any individual to expect that he shall escape all the dangers and diseases which have proved so fatal to others, and live as long as man can live according to the course of nature? It is extremely absurd in the young as well as the old, to calculate on the continuance of life, and place dependence upon the residue of their years, which they may never see. This vain hope of futurity is no less dangerous than absurd. It stupifies the minds of the godly, and makes them more negligent and

unfaithful in discharging the duties which they owe to God, to themselves, and to their fellow men. It strengthens the hands and encourages the hearts of the wicked to continue in their vain and vicious courses, and to neglect their spiritual and eternal concerns. It is the strongest and most fatal practical error that mankind ever imbibed. It has slain its thousands and ten thousands. It proved fatal to millions that were suddenly and unexpectedly swept away by the flood. It proved fatal to the men of Sodom and Gomorrah. It led Felix to stifle conviction, and postpone the care of his soul to a season he never found. And it still has the same hardening and destructive influence upon all impenitent and unbelieving sinners. Let no person, therefore, boast of to-morrow; for he knows not what a day may bring forth. God is every day depriving men of the residue of their years, and destroying their vain and groundless expectations of long life. This is a plain and solemn comment upon Christ's admonition to all: "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."

3. Since God deprives so many of the residue of their years, we ought to beware of placing too much dependence upon the lives of others, as well as upon our own. Others are as liable to leave us as we are to leave them; their lives may be shortened, while ours are prolonged; and we have no more right to place dependence upon their living, than upon living ourselves. We are all exposed to meet death at any future moment, and therefore have no just ground to place absolute dependence upon one another. But we are extremely prone to place such undue dependence upon some of those with whom we are nearly related or connected. We are apt to flatter ourselves that they will live to promote our comfort and support, as long as we shall need to be comforted and supported in the present state. Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, are naturally inclined to place too much dependence upon the lives of each other. Warm and intimate friends are no less exposed to entertain and cherish the same delusion. And sometimes a whole nation place all their hopes of public peace and prosperity upon a wise and faithful sovereign, or upon a young and promising prince. Hence says David, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth: in that very day his thoughts perish." This equally applies to the pious parent and dutiful child, to the faithful friend and kind benefactor, and to every person upon whom we place unlimited dependence. Let us, therefore, "cease from man: —for wherein is he to be accounted of?" The residue of life

is a blessing which God may grant or deny to any of our connections or friends; and it depends upon his sovereign pleasure whether we shall live and die together, or whether we shall soon follow them, or they soon follow us, to the silent mansions of the dead.

4. If God so often deprives men of the residue of their years, then long life is a great as well as distinguishing favor. Very few of mankind are allowed to live to old age, while a large majority are cut down in the morning or meridian of life. To live, while multitudes fall on our right hand and on our left, is a distinguishing favor. But it is no less important than distinguishing. There is no other earthly blessing so valuable in its own nature. It is a talent capable of being improved to the highest public and private advantage. God promised to Abraham that "he should go to his fathers in peace, and be buried in a good old age." And he promises to those who love him sincerely, that "he will satisfy them with long life, and show them his salvation." It was esteemed a mark of divine favor in the days of Job, "to come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in its season." The same sentiment still prevails among mankind; especially when they view death approaching. Pious Hezekiah would not have so sincerely regretted the loss of life, had he not considered the residue of his years as of the greatest importance. And almost every sick person, whether young or old, sincerely desires to be spared a little longer; and some would give the whole world, if they had it to give, that they might have fifteen years, or even fifteen months, added to their lives. How often do the sick and dying ardently desire to live, that they may regain the time they have lost, and perform the duties they have neglected! And what an unspeakable privilege would they esteem it, to have their days prolonged! Such declarations, made under such circumstances, have every appearance of sincerity and truth, and carry clear and convincing evidence that long life is a most desirable and invaluable blessing. The continuance of life is also much to be desired, for the sake of having greater opportunity of doing, as well as of getting good. Hezekiah did much more for the glory of God and the good of his kingdom than he could have done, if he had been deprived of the residue of his years. Joseph did much more for the benefit of his father's family, his own nation, the kingdom of Egypt, and the good of the church, than he could have done, if his life had not been ransomed from the power of the grave. Joshua and Caleb did much more for the safety and happiness of Israel than they could have done, if they had fallen with those who perished in the wilderness. The eminent services of David were owing to

the preservation of his life from the paw of the lion and of the bear, and from the mighty hand of Goliah. It is very remarkable, that some of the most useful men have been signally snatched from the jaws of death, to teach the world the importance of life in the present state, where so much is to be done for the temporal and spiritual good of mankind. And since good men are to be rewarded according to their works, the longer they are permitted to live, the greater opportunity they enjoy of promoting their own future felicity. There is no period in their existence so valuable to themselves, as the present life, in which all their pious labors and sufferings will work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. How precious is every moment, every hour, and every year, added to our lives! It ought to be our heart's desire and prayer to God, that he who has hitherto carried us from the womb, would still carry us even to old age, and cover our heads with those gray hairs, which are the fruit of righteousness and a crown of glory.

5. If God always has wise and good reasons for depriving men of the residue of their years, then it is as reasonable to submit to his providence in one instance of mortality as another. He knows that some will be much more affected by being deprived of long life, than others. He knows how the gay and vain youth will feel when he sees death approaching, and what extreme hope and fear will agitate his heart in the prospect of leaving a world which he loves, and going to another which he dreads. He knows how the strong and enterprising man will feel, when all his promising prospects are cut off, and he looks forward with fearful apprehensions of lying down in everlasting disappointment and sorrow. He knows the views and feelings of the good man, who, like Hezekiah, anticipates the loss of many years which he had devoted to the good of his family, his friends, and his fellow men. He knows the hopes and desires of those who have passed the common boundaries of life, when they are about to be deprived of the small remnant of their days. And he equally knows the sorrows, the sighs and groans of surviving friends, under all these instances of mortality. But he never afflicts willingly, nor grieves the children of men. He takes no pleasure in giving anxiety and distress to the dying, nor in grieving the hearts of the living. He has as good reasons for depriving the young as the old, the rich as the poor, the high as the low, the pious as the impious, of the residue of their years. And these reasons ought to bow the hearts of mourners to a cheerful submission under his holy and correcting hand. He never deprives any human being of the privilege of living, only when he knows the loss sustained

will be certainly outweighed by a superior good. This ought to satisfy the minds of survivors, whether the bereavements they are called to endure be more or less unexpected and severe. If they have lost a lovely infant or promising youth, a pious father or virtuous mother, an intimate friend or kind benefactor, or one united to them by the tenderest ties of affection, it still ought to be the language of their hearts, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." If it be true that there is no sorrow like unto their sorrow, it is equally true that the Judge of all the earth has done right, and that their will ought to be swallowed up in his. It is as reasonable to submit to the heaviest as to the lightest afflictions, and commonly much more easy; because the heaviest afflictions appear to come more immediately from the wisdom, goodness and justice of the Deity, which are the most powerful motives to a filial fear, a holy confidence, and a sincere submission.

May these thoughts sink deeply into the minds of those who have been sorely bereaved in the course of the last week. The afflicted parents have lost an amiable and only daughter,* whom they had nurtured from her childhood to youth, with uncommon care and tenderness. What they long feared has come upon them. God has removed the dear object of their parental affections to the land of silence. But the Judge of all the earth has, in this, as in all other instances, done right. It becomes them to be still, and know that he is God. Let them neither despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when they are rebuked of him. Let them not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which they are now called to endure; but rejoice in the opportunity of becoming partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, they may be glad also with exceeding joy.

But those who have just committed to the grave the last of their dear parents, have received a more deep and lasting wound. Until a few weeks past they fondly expected that their kind and indulgent father, who had guided them through their young and inexperienced age, would have still lived to comfort and counsel them in their riper years. But a holy and sovereign God has been pleased to destroy both his and their expectations. They ought to realize the greatness of the loss they have sustained; and they will realize it more and more, as often as they call to remembrance his exemplary conduct, his sage counsels, his agreeable conversation, and all that he said

* This daughter of Capt. Robert Gilmor died very unexpectedly, in the twentieth year of her age. Though she had long been subject to an asthmatic complaint, yet her death was not apprehended until a few hours before she expired.

and did, to make them useful and respectable in this life, and happy in the life to come. But great as their loss is, they have no just cause to murmur or repine under the chastening hand of God, but have abundant reason to feel and express entire submission to his will. Though father and mother have forsaken them, yet the Lord will take them up, if they will only become his dutiful and obedient children. They never have had, and perhaps they never will have, a louder call to make their peace with God. Now, therefore, let them acquaint themselves with him, and be at peace, and thereby good shall come unto them.

Not only the mourners, but all this people, ought now to hear the voice of God in his word and providence. We are all liable to be deprived of the residue of our years, and know not how soon our days may be numbered and finished. We are all hastening to our final hour, and need to be in constant preparation for it. None have a license to delay, and presume upon an uncertain futurity. Those who expect to be the last, may be the first, to meet the king of terrors. Life is infinitely precious, and ought to be wisely and faithfully improved while it lasts. The most useful men may be called from the stage of action, in the midst of their usefulness. Of this they are loudly admonished by the death of Deacon WHITING. He was a man of a strong mind, and of good principles, and firmly engaged to promote the cause of truth, virtue, and religion. He filled every public station in which he moved, with fidelity and dignity. And had his life been spared, he might have done much more for the civil and religious benefit of this people. His death is a great loss to the town as well as to the church. Let the useful lay it to heart, and become more active and faithful in discharging all their public and private duties. Let the little flock of Christ, who are bereaved of one of their religious officers and most influential members, double their diligence, trim their lamps, and stand in actual readiness for the coming of their Lord. Let them set their houses in order, and persevere in well-doing, and then the day of their death shall be better than the day of their birth.

# SERMON VIII.

## COMMUNION WITH GOD IN AFFLICTION.

FUNERAL OF MISS ESTHER WILDER, DAUGHTER OF REV. JOHN WILDER, OF ATTLEBOROUGH, JULY 19, 1808.

RIGHTEOUS art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments. —JER. xii. 1.

JEREMIAH was sanctified from the womb. He grew up a dutiful and obedient child of God. And while he was discharging the office of a prophet, he often had occasion for the exercise of his filial spirit, under the tokens of the divine displeasure. He lived to see and feel many of the divine judgments which he had been inspired to foretel. And in this chapter, he acquaints his suffering nation how he had felt and conducted under the afflicting hand of God. He freely acknowledges, that he had seen no reason to complain of any undue severity or unrighteousness in the divine dispensation; but yet he felt a desire to converse with God in his providence.

Such views and feelings were not peculiar to the afflicted prophet; for they have always been common to the children of God under affliction. It is, therefore, a general truth, which we shall endeavor to illustrate in the present discourse:

That when God sees fit to afflict his children, they are disposed to converse with him in his providence.

I shall inquire,

I. Why God sees fit to afflict his children by the dispensations of his providence.

II. Why they are disposed to converse with him in their afflictions.

III. What methods they take to converse with him, under the correcting hand of providence.

I. We are to inquire why God sees fit, in the course of providence, to afflict his children.

It does not appear strange that he should afflict his enemies, with whom he is justly angry every day. We are sometimes ready to wonder that he does suffer the wicked to pass with so much impunity, while they trample on his authority, abuse his goodness, and presume upon his patience. This was a matter of wonder not only to Job and David, but to Jeremiah, who takes particular notice of God's afflicting his friends, while he prospered his enemies. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" But God's thoughts are above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways. He sees good reasons for passing by his enemies, and for laying his heavy hand on his friends. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." It appears from the history which God has given us of his providence, that he has often chastised his children with greater severity than his most malignant enemies. Who have ever suffered greater personal afflictions than the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, and some of the most pious christians? But the question is, why does God so often and so severely afflict his children? Without pretending to penetrate his secret counsels, we may safely mention two or three plain and obvious reasons for such dispensations of providence.

1. God sometimes afflicts his children to reclaim them from their delusions in religion. They are naturally bent to backsliding. They often depart from God, become barren and unfruitful in his service, and live to themselves instead of living to him. This he observes and resents in those whom he has distinguished by his special grace. And when they will not be reclaimed by his mercies, nor by the mild admonitions of his word, he often teaches them their folly and guilt by the severe method of his chastising providence. When David wandered from God, he chastised and reclaimed him by the rod of his wrath. This he gratefully acknowledges in one of his psalms. "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." When the people of God forsook his ordinances, and walked after false gods, he sent them into Babylon, where he punished them for their idolatry, and reclaimed them from their national declension. He still pursues the same method of discipline towards his ungrateful and disobedient children. He chastises them by the rod of affliction, to

reclaim them from their sinful wanderings. Hence says the apostle to christians, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Farthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." God always has a gracious design in chastising his children for their offences, which is to reclaim them, and revive their languishing graces.

2. God sometimes afflicts his children to try their sincerity, and give them an opportunity of knowing their own hearts. While they enjoy uninterrupted prosperity, they are apt to be inattentive to what passes in their own minds, and to mistake the nature of their moral exercises. They often imagine that their hearts are much better than they are. But when God tries them with affliction, he gives them opportunity to discover whether their hearts are right or wrong in his sight. He led the Israelites the long and distressing journey through the wilderness, to try them, and to see what was in their hearts. The method he took completely answered his purpose, and discovered both his friends and his enemies. He has often both destroyed and confirmed the hopes of men, by causing them to pass through the furnace of affliction. Many who have thought that they could, have found upon trial that they could not, patiently endure affliction; while some who have thought that they could not, have found upon trial that they could, endure divine corrections with submission. David was confirmed in his sincerity, by the method God took to prove him. "Thou hast proved mine heart," says he; "thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing." Job had as strong confidence in his afflictions, that they would discover the purity of his heart. "Then Job answered and said, Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." This is an end worthy of God to propose, in afflicting his children. It is of great importance to their spiritual interest, that

their sincerity should be tried and established. In this view, they have no reason to think strange of any afflictions which they are called to endure. Hence says the apostle Peter to suffering christians, "Beloved, think it not strange, concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

3. God sometimes afflicts his children, for the purpose of displaying the beauty and excellence of true religion before the eyes of the world. This seems to have been his principal design in calling Abraham to the severe trial of sacrificing his son. It does not appear that he meant to chastise him for any thing which he had done amiss, but merely to exhibit his extraordinary faith and love to all succeeding generations of mankind. He designed to answer the same end, by the complication of evils which he brought upon Job. He intended to give him an opportunity to act out that disinterested benevolence, which is the essence of all true religion, and the highest excellence of every moral character. He ordered it so in providence, that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, should be cast into the fiery furnace, and Daniel into the den of lions, that they might display their faith and confidence in his own power and faithfulness, to the confusion and conviction of stupid idolaters. And there is reason to believe that he calls some of his dutiful children to endure fiery trials, to display their faith, patience, and submission, before a stupid and unbelieving world. In some cases, at least, we can hardly discover any other important end to be answered by afflicting his peculiar friends, than this, of displaying their superior virtue and piety. Thus God often sees proper to afflict his children, either to display their excellence, or to try their hearts, or to reclaim them from their deviations from the path of duty.

Let us next inquire,

II. Why they are disposed to converse with him under his afflicting hand. It is not because they entertain the least thought that he is treating them unrighteously. They are established in the belief that the Judge of all the earth always does right. This, the prophet freely acknowledges to be his belief. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee." All the children of God have been thoroughly convinced of the perfect rectitude of the divine dispensations towards themselves and the whole human race. But still, like the prophet, they desire to talk with God of his judgments.

1. Because they want to know why he afflicts them. They are fully satisfied that he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve

the children of men, and therefore they believe that he has some particular reasons for causing them to suffer their present afflictions. Job wished to know why God subjected him in particular to such peculiar and severe trials. "I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, show me wherefore thou contendest with me." "I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder; he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark." The afflicted often find themselves in such darkness, respecting the divine conduct towards them. They cannot easily discover why God should set them as a mark, and cause his sharpest arrows to pierce their hearts. This raises a strong desire to talk with him of his judgments, and search after the causes of their affliction. They know that God is able to turn their attention to their own hearts and conduct, and cause them to read his design in the dealings of his providence.

2. They desire to converse with God in his providence, because they wish to know how they should feel and conduct in their afflicted state. They know that God takes peculiar notice of their views and feelings under his correcting hand; and that they are extremely liable, either to despise his chastenings, or to faint under his rebukes. This critical situation naturally leads them to converse with God, and seek for divine light and instruction. There is none who can teach like God, and who claims the prerogative of teaching his afflicted children. "Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." And when God afflicts, for the benefit of the afflicted, he always means to instruct them. Hence says the Psalmist: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." While God is frowning upon his children, they wish to feel and express those filial affections which are correspondent to his designs in afflicting them. This disposes them to converse with their heavenly Father, and inquire how they ought to feel and speak and act, under the tokens of his just displeasure.

3. There is another reason why they wish to converse with God under their afflictions, and that is, because they desire to obtain divine support and consolation. It is natural for children to fly to their earthly parents for comfort and relief when they are involved in danger or distress. And it is no less natural for the children of God to look to him for light and peace in the day of adversity. When denied of all other support and relief, they have often found God to be a present help in time of trouble. "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can

behold him?" This language of Elihu all the children of God can adopt. And so can they the language of the prophet, when he said to God, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee." They know by past experience, that in God's light, they can see light; and that, in a clear view of the perfection of his nature, and the rectitude of his government, their thoughts will be composed, and they shall enjoy that peace which the world cannot give, nor take away.

For these reasons, the children of God naturally fly to him in distress, and desire to converse with him under the dark and distressing dispensations of providence. It only remains to inquire,

III. What methods they take to converse with God in time of trouble.

Though they cannot converse with their Maker face to face, as a man converses with his friend, yet there are various ways in which they may hold intercourse with their heavenly Father, whom they may always see by an eye of faith.

1. By meditating upon the history of his providence. He has been pleased to record in his word the most remarkable and instructive instances of his conduct towards his peculiar and faithful friends, from age to age. His afflicted children naturally turn their thoughts upon his dealings with those who have gone before them, through the evils and dangers of this evil world. They can read the heart of God towards his friends, in his treatment of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Joseph and Moses, of Job and Daniel, and of many others, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises. The conduct of God towards those ancient worthies was designed for the learning and instruction of his afflicted friends in all future ages. Hence David conversed with God in his dark and distressing hours, by a delightful meditation upon his works of old. "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old." The apostle James directs christians to take the same method to converse with God, and seek relief in their troubles. "Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." God has expressed his paternal feelings towards his children, by the frowns, as well as the smiles of his providence. This his children know, and, therefore, spontaneously turn to the book of Job, or to the book of Psalms, when they find themselves involved in darkness and affliction. They consider the word of God as

the proper medium, through which he converses with them, and they may converse with him. And by conversing with him in this way which he has appointed, they find peculiar light and instruction. It is the plain language of his providence, that he is treating them just as he has always treated his most sincere and cordial friends; which is a consoling thought to their troubled minds.

2. Another method which they take to converse with God in his providence is, to review the course of his conduct towards themselves through all the past scenes and stages of their lives. By such a review, they clearly perceive that God has been wise and gracious in all his providential dealings towards them. They find he has treated them far better than they have deserved, expected, or even desired; that what often appeared to be against them, eventually appeared to be for them; and that afflictions have proved to be great and distinguishing favors. When the children of God are afflicted, they naturally look back and meditate upon what they have enjoyed and suffered in the course of life; and such meditation carries their minds to God, and fills them with devout affections. "While I was musing," says the Psalmist, "the fire burned." And again he says, "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, my foot slippeth; thy mercy O Lord, held me up. In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." While the children of God are retracing and musing upon the foot-steps of providence, they hold an intimate and pleasing intercourse with their heavenly Father. By reflecting upon his smiles and frowns, and their own feelings under them, they call into exercise hope and fear, love and joy, faith and submission, and the whole train of gracious affections. Their hearts become conformed to the manifestations of God in his providence, which is the most desirable and salutary effect of affliction.

3. The children of God never fail to converse with God by prayer, while they are suffering his fatherly chastisements. For this, they are greatly prepared, by musing on his past and present dispensations towards themselves and others. These fill their mouths with arguments, and constrain them to draw near to God, and make known their wants and desires, their hopes and fears, by prayer and supplication. They have often found him to be a present help in time of trouble. They delight to pour out their hearts before him, as a Father who is ready to hear, and able to relieve. David took this method to converse with God in his afflictions. "Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that

599097

is higher than I. My soul, wait thou only upon God: he only is my rock and my salvation." It is by prayer, that God would have his children come and converse with him, under his correcting hand. He says in his word, "Is any of you afflicted, let him pray." And again, "Call upon me in the day of trouble." He delights in the prayers of the upright. He loves to hear his afflicted children call upon his name; and they love to unbosom themselves to their heavenly Father, and commit themselves and all their concerns, for time and eternity, to his wise and gracious disposal.

This subject may, in the first place, teach the children of God to restrain their unreasonable expectations of outward prosperity in the present life. They have reason to expect less prosperity, and more adversity, than commonly falls to the lot of other men. God is here preparing both the righteous and the wicked for their final state. Adversity is better suited than prosperity, to promote the present holiness and future happiness of the godly; but prosperity is better suited than adversity, to augment the present guilt and future misery of the wicked. It was this consideration that convinced David of the propriety of the divine conduct, in sending prosperity to sinners, and adversity to saints. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish." "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God: then understood I their end." Thus God often grants the desires of the wicked, while he sends leanness into their souls; but it is through much tribulation that he commonly conducts his children to the kingdom of heaven. They have much reason, therefore, to expect that he will repeatedly and severely correct them, while he is making them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

In the second place, this subject may teach the godly, that adversity may be much more beneficial to them than prosperity. The smiles of Providence often lead good men, as well as others, to be forgetful of God, unthankful for his mercies, and unfaithful in his service; but the frowns of Providence are

directly suited to reclaim them from their wanderings, to inspire them with gratitude for forfeited favors, and to awaken every filial affection in their hearts. Though no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous, yet it often yields afterward the peaceable fruit of righteousness. God often comforts his mourning children with the consolations of his spirit, and gives them "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." They never enjoy a more favorable opportunity of conversing with God, and of living religion, than while they are feeling the smart of his fatherly chastisements.

In the third place, this subject exhibits a peculiar and distinguishing mark of grace, by which every one may determine whether he is or is not a real child of God. It is the habitual disposition of the true children of God to converse with him from day to day, under all the various dispensations of his providence. They find a peculiar pleasure in tracing all the good and evil they experience to the hand and heart of God, and in exercising affections correspondent to his daily dispensations. Enoch walked with God, and conversed with him in his providence. Isaac meditated upon God, and conversed with him in his providence. Moses lived as seeing God who is invisible, and conversed with him in his providence. David kept himself in the fear of God all the day long, and conversed with him in his providence. And Jeremiah expressly tells us that he conversed with God in his providence. Such a free, familiar and habitual intercourse with God under his smiles and frowns, forms an essential distinction between his children and the rest of the world. The world say unto God, Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways; but his children say unto him, It is good for us to draw near unto thee, and to talk with thee of thy judgments. Do your hearts, my hearers, now approve, or reproach you? Do they testify for, or against you? Do you, or do you not, habitually and delightfully converse with God in his providence?

But I must proceed no farther in general reflections upon the subject. It is time to apply it more especially to those who are called this day to commit to the dust the remains of their dear deceased daughter.

I know, my friends, that your affliction is very great. You have been called to part with your first-born, and very promising child, in the morning of her life, and in the flower of her age.* That modest appearance, that serious deportment, and that maturity of thought, which she early displayed, could not

* She had just entered upon the eighteenth year of her age.

fail of attracting a large share of your parental affections.* But neither your attachment to her, nor her attachment to you, could preserve her much desired life. She is gone to that world from which she will never return. The decease of such a lovely and beloved youth, is one of the most dark and distressing dispensations of Providence. This calls you to plead with God, and talk with him of his judgments. While you feel the rod of correction, you will seriously and attentively consider who has appointed it. The God who gave you your daughter, has taken her away. The God to whom you dedicated your daughter, has taken her away. The God to whom you have devoted yourselves and all that you have, has taken her away. The God who has a right to do what he will with his own, has taken her away. He clearly foresaw all the consequences which would flow from this early death, to you, and to your child, both in time and eternity. And in the full view of all these things, he has seen fit to do what he has done. His reasons have forestalled all your objections; and could you discover them now, they would completely convince you of the wisdom and goodness, as well as rectitude, of his conduct. But what you know not now, you shall know hereafter. In the mean time, it becomes you to submit your understanding to his understanding, and your will to his will, and to say in the language of the prophet, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when we plead with thee, and when we talk with thee of thy judgments." By thus submissively and delightfully conversing with God, under his bereaving hand, you may derive greater comfort and consolation than can be derived from the enjoyment of sons or of daughters. Though God has dried up one stream of happiness, yet he appears to you the fountain. Though he has taken away your child, yet he offers you himself. Cast your cares and burdens upon the Lord, and he will sustain you. The Lord hath smitten, but he will bind you up. The Lord hath torn, but he will heal you. He is giving you a peculiar opportunity to display your love, your faith, your submission, and all the beauties of the christian character. Draw near to him, and he will draw near to you. Pour out your hearts before him, and he will pour out his spirit upon you,

* She was, from her childhood, given to reading and thinking upon religious subjects; but when she found her health declining, she manifested a deeper concern about the salvation of her soul. Though she never pretended to be free from doubts and fears respecting her spiritual state, yet she sometimes expressed such views and feelings as might be justly considered as evidential of a change of heart. Being questioned whether she thought she could be happy in the presence of God, in the company of saints and angels, and in the employments of heaven, she humbly replied, she thought she could enjoy perfect satisfaction in the presence, contemplation and fruition of such holy and heavenly objects.

and grant you inward comfort according to your trouble, and cause this light affliction to work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

May this first breach in your large and rising family be sanctified to all of them who are capable of taking notice of their loss, and of remembering the sickness and death of their dear, departed sister. May their young and tender hearts be deeply affected with a sense of their own frailty and mortality, and of the distinguishing goodness of God in giving them farther opportunity to prepare for a sick and dying hour. They know not which of their names stands next in death's commission. This first death in this numerous family is a loud call to the rest to be ready also. May they remember their Creator in the days of their youth. Let them not put far away the evil day; it may be near. Their sister will never return to them, but they may soon be called to go to her. And whether their lives shall be shortened or lengthened, let them walk in that strait and narrow way which leads to everlasting life.

May this solemn instance of mortality deeply affect the youth in this place. One of your number is gone, and you know not how soon some of you may be called to follow. Are any of you ready? Have any of you made your peace with God? Have any of you put away vain thoughts and become sober-minded? Do any of you converse with God, and call upon his name every day, for sparing and pardoning mercy? If you still cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God, and walk in the way of your hearts, and in the sight of your eyes, you are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and ripening fast for ruin. O that you would be wise, that you would understand this, that you would consider, and before it be too late, prepare for your latter end!

May we all, of every age, character, and condition, remember that the grave is our house, and that death is on its way to meet us. May we day by day fulfil the duties of the day, converse with God in his providence, and prepare to close a useful life with a peaceful death, and to exchange a scene of sorrow for a world of joy. Amen.

# SERMON IX.

## FUTURE STATE OF CHRISTIANS.

FUNERAL OF MRS. ESTHER WILDER, WIFE OF REV. JOHN WILDER, OF ATTLEBOROUGH, WHO DIED JANUARY 19, 1811, IN HER 42ND YEAR.

BELOVED, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. — 1 JOHN, iii. 2.

AS THE men of the world were ignorant of the true character of Christ, and treated him with disdain and contempt, so they have viewed and treated his faithful followers in the same manner ever since. But the Lord knoweth them that are his, and the time is coming when he will cause them to appear in all the beauties of holiness, and in the full enjoyment of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The apostle, therefore, in this epistle, which he wrote for the consolation of christians in the present life, assures them that they are the objects of God's peculiar favor, and that he intends to distinguish them with the highest marks of his paternal affections. But he directs them to draw their present comfort from the hopes of a future and better state beyond the grave. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." These words equally apply to the children of God in every age, and afford them the same ground of consolation under all the trials and afflictions which they are called to experience, while passing through this present evil world.

Agreeably to the letter and spirit of the text, I shall consider,

I. The character of the children of God.

II. What they do not know concerning themselves in a future state.

III. What they do know concerning themselves in that state.

I. We are to consider the character of the children of God. All the children of men are, in one sense, the children of God, and are called his offspring; but the apostle, in the text and preceding verse, is speaking of real christians, whom he means to distinguish from the rest of the world, by the endearing appellation of the sons of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God," that is, in distinction from the world, who know us not. The primary ground upon which real christians are denominated the children of God, is the renovation of their hearts, by which they partake of the divine nature, and become transformed into the divine image. The apostle says in the last verse of the preceding chapter, "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." And in his gospel he says, "Christ came to his own, but his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." All men are naturally enemies to God, and will never feel and act like dutiful children towards him, until he renews their hearts, and gives them the spirit of adoption. And it is this filial spirit, which forms all the beautiful and amiable traits in the christian character.

1. It disposes the children of God to love him with an ardent and supreme affection. While they feel the spirit of adoption, they are ready to cry, "Abba, Father," and to say from the heart, "Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that we desire besides thee." As dutiful children love their parents more than any other of their earthly relatives or friends, so the children of God give him the supreme place in their affections. They love him more than father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter, or any other earthly or heavenly object. Being born of God, they experimentally know the supreme glory and moral excellence of their heavenly Father. "For love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. God is love: and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." In the exercise of a filial spirit, the children of God feel as he feels, and love him supremely for that pure, perfect, disinterested

love, which renders him infinitely worthy of the supreme affection of all his intelligent creatures.

2. This same filial spirit disposes them to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and to believe in him alone for salvation. Their love to the Father is inseparably connected with love to the Son. So our Saviour repeatedly said to the Jews: "If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me." Again he said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." None will come to the Son for life, until they are taught of the Father that they deserve to die; but when they have learned of him that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and that there is no other name than that of Christ under heaven given among men whereby they can be saved, they are prepared to feel their perishing need of his atonement for sin. And as soon as the love of the Father is shed abroad in their hearts, they will love his Son, and believe in him alone for pardon and salvation. All the children of God, therefore, are believers in Christ. They love and honor the Son as they love and honor the Father. They are united to the Son, as the branches are united to the vine, and as the members are united to the body. In a word, they are one with the Son, as he is one with the Father.

3. A filial spirit unites all the children of God to one another. The spirit of adoption is a spirit of union among all the household of faith. Those who love their heavenly Father love all his children, who bear his image and possess his spirit. Our Saviour makes mutual love among his followers the infallible mark of their sincerity. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." And he says again, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." His beloved apostle John well remembered this precept, and would have his christian brethren remember it. "This," says he, "is the message that ye heard from the beginning, That we should love one another." And again he says, "This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." In the lively exercise of this truly christian spirit, he goes on to say, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God. — Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. — If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? — Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God: And every one that

loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." "By this we know that we love the children of God." Where can you find a family of children, who are cordially attached to their parents, that are not sincerely attached to each other, in mutual affection? A filial spirit towards God is always a fraternal spirit towards the sons of God, and causes them to feel like David and Jonathan, who loved one another as their own souls.

4. A filial spirit is a spirit of grace and of supplication. It disposes the children of God to pray as Christ teaches them to pray, saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." It sweetly constrains them to cry, Abba, Father: and, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to make known their requests unto him, who is able and ready to do more abundantly than they are able to ask or think. They feel a holy freedom and humble boldness in addressing the throne of grace, and in pleading, with fervency and importunity, for every temporal and spiritual blessing, which they need from day to day and from time to time. As dutiful children repair to their kind and tender parents to gratify their reasonable desires, so the children of God continually call upon him to give them every good and perfect gift, which he may see fit to bestow. I must add farthermore,

5. That a filial spirit towards God disposes his children to obey all his commands. Children, who love their parents, always take pleasure in obeying their will. Just so the children of God esteem his precepts concerning all things to be right, and find a pleasure in performing the duties which he has enjoined upon them. They delight to do his will, and his law is in their hearts. They mean to express their love to him in all the various ways which he has pointed out in his word, and to discharge every duty which they owe to him, to their fellow creatures, and to themselves. They mean to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. They live in the habitual practice of reading his word, keeping his Sabbath, attending public worship, and doing to all as they would that all should do them. Whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they mean to do all to his glory. It is their sincere desire to be followers of God, as dear children; to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called; and to let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father who is in heaven. Such are the genuine effects of a filial spirit, which forms the excellent character of the children of God. Let us next consider,

II. What they do not know concerning themselves in a

future state. The apostle freely allows, that so long as they live in this world, they do not know what they shall be in another. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Though the children of God know themselves to be such, yet they find something dark and inconceivable, in respect to their existence in the world of spirits. It doth not appear to them at present, what they shall be hereafter. God has been pleased to hide eternity from the view of all the living, by a thick and impenetrable covering. He challenged Job to discover what he had himself concealed upon this awful subject. "Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" The children of God are profoundly ignorant of some things respecting their future state. I will mention two or three particulars.

1. They are wholly unacquainted with the means by which they shall *perceive* either material or spiritual objects, after they have lost their bodily senses. Heaven is full of great and glorious objects. Christ is there, Enoch is there, and Elijah is there, clothed in material bodies. There is also an innumerable company of angels and of the spirits of just men made perfect there. These holy and happy beings are undoubtedly visible to each other. But how they become visible to one another, it is utterly beyond our present power to conceive. They cannot discover each other intuitively, as God sees all his creatures in all parts of his vast dominions, at one clear, comprehensive view. There must be some medium of perception to all created spirits; but we can form no idea, in the present state, what that medium is, by which the unbodied spirits of the children of God discover the beings and objects of the invisible world.

2. It is no less dark and mysterious how they will converse with one another, and with the heavenly hosts, after they leave these mortal bodies. We may presume that all the inhabitants of heaven are able to communicate their thoughts, their views and feelings, to each other, in the most easy, clear and perfect manner. They have no occasion for the least reserve in laying open their minds, and expressing every affection of their perfectly holy and friendly hearts. And though there may be seasons of profound silence in heaven, yet we have good reason to believe that most of their time is delightfully employed in conversing upon the most glorious and important subjects. But it is altogether beyond our present power to conceive by what medium or language they hold a free and mutual intercourse. The difficulty increases, when we reflect upon the great diversity of languages in this world, and the various means

that are used to convey and receive ideas and sentiments in the present state. For we must suppose that in heaven there is but one medium of conversing, which is common to the great Mediator, to angels, and to men of all nations, and which can be immediately understood by every human soul, upon its first arrival in the kingdom of glory. I will observe only once more,

3. Upon this dark side of the subject, that the children of God must remain totally ignorant in this life, how they shall arrive in heaven, and how they shall move from place to place, after they arrive there. Our Lord has told us, that there are many mansions in heaven, which plainly implies that all the inhabitants do not always dwell together, but are sometimes locally separated from each other, by different apartments in their Father's house. And if this be true, then they will have frequent occasions of passing from mansion to mansion, and from one situation to another, in order to pursue the employments and enjoy the blessedness of the heavenly world. But how they will be able, with ease and celerity, to traverse the immense circuit of heaven, and see the various situations of the innumerable multitudes of holy and happy creatures, we must continue ignorant until our great and last change. Many other things might be mentioned, which we cannot know this side of eternity. But as God has seen fit to conceal them from his children, they may rest satisfied that it is best they should remain in ignorance, until they arrive at that world where they shall see as they are seen, and know as they are known. Their present ignorance of what they shall be, is undoubtedly designed to try their faith and confidence in God, and to teach them entire submission to his disposing will. Let us now turn our attention to brighter prospects, and consider,

III. What the children of God do know concerning themselves in a future state. The apostle confidently asserts that they are not altogether ignorant of what they shall be when they shine forth in the kingdom of their Father. "But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." It may seem by this mode of expression, that the children of God shall not know what they shall be, until the day of judgment. "But we know that, when he shall appear," &c. This branch of the text might have been rendered, "when it shall appear." That is, when our state shall appear, then we shall know that we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. But our state will appear as soon as we leave the world, and long before the great and last day. This leads me to observe,

1. That the children of God do now know where they shall

be hereafter. Divine inspiration assures them that, when they die, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." The prophet, speaking of the death of the righteous, says, "They shall enter into peace." Our Saviour told his disciples, for their consolation, when he was going to leave them, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also." And when he was expiring on the cross, he graciously declared to the poor penitent, believing malefactor, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." He represented the departed spirit of Lazarus, as being carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The primitive christians used to say, "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord." Paul, who taught this doctrine, firmly believed it. "For," says he, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." And we are expressly told, that "the general assembly and church of the first-born" in heaven, is composed of "the spirits of just men made perfect." Among these we find Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Elias, mentioned by name. Indeed, we have abundant evidence to believe that all who have died in the Lord are now in heaven with their divine Redeemer. Notwithstanding all that has been said about the soul's sleeping between death and the resurrection, and about this world's being the final abode of the blessed, the children of God may be assured that heaven will be the place of their eternal residence, whither their souls shall be safely conducted as soon as they shall drop their clayey tabernacles.

2. They know in this world what manner of persons they shall be in the next. In this world, they resemble God, in some measure; but in that which is to come, they shall be entirely conformed to his moral image. "But we know," says the apostle, "that when he shall appear, we shall be like him." The children of God are in a state of progression. Their path is like the rising sun, which shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. The word of God and the ordinances of the gospel are calculated and designed, to promote their spiritual edification, and carry them forward in their christian course, until they arrive at sinless perfection. Accordingly, we read, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." As soon as the sons of God shall reach the heavenly world, they will be perfectly purified from all

moral pollution, and never have another sinful emotion or exercise of heart. They will be holy as God is holy, and perfect as he is perfect. They know, therefore, that when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. Hence,

3. They know that when they shall leave this present evil world, they shall be completely blessed. For,

In the first place, their moral likeness to God will give them as clear and full knowledge of all the divine perfections and conduct, as their limited capacities will admit. This is plainly asserted in the text. "But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Seeing here signifies knowing, and seeing God as he is, signifies knowing him clearly and fully, without the least error or mistake. In this world, the children of God see him through a glass darkly, but in the next, they will see him face to face. Their present ignorance of him chiefly arises from the contrariety of their hearts to his great and amiable character; but when they shall become perfectly conformed to his moral image, they will naturally see him as he is, and have a clear, just and full view of all the displays which he has made of himself. Such knowledge David expected to derive from his future conformity of heart to God. "I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness." And our Lord declared, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." When the children of God become perfectly like him in holiness, they will delight to contemplate upon all his works of creation, providence and grace, and to discover more and more of the connection, the harmony, the wisdom and benevolence, which run through the whole. As soon as the blindness of their hearts is completely removed, the eyes of their understanding will be opened to see that "the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." This will clear up the dark and mysterious dispensations of providence towards themselves and others, rectify their former errors and misapprehensions, and pour into their holy and enlarged minds a flood of light and joy. And these holy and beatific views of God will prepare them,

In the next place, for all the services and employments of the heavenly world. As their knowledge of God increases, their hearts will be enlarged in his holy and reasonable service. They will be as willing to serve and glorify God, as the angels of light. They will cheerfully unite with the heavenly hosts in all their acts of homage, adoration and praise. They will never be weary, as they were in this world, in the duties of devotion; but will joyfully join those pure and perfect spirits,

who rest not day and night, in celebrating the astonishing displays of divine glory.

Finally, their perfect likeness to the Deity will prepare them for the full and everlasting enjoyment of him. While they love him for every perfection of his nature, for every work of his hands, for every dispensation of his providence, for every act of his grace, and even for every display of his justice, they must necessarily derive complete satisfaction from every being, and creature, and object, in the universe. And this satisfaction must be raised to perfect felicity, by knowing that they are greatly beloved by their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier, and all their holy fellow creatures in heaven. Such mutual love between God and the children of God, will be the consummation of their blessedness. And surely this is enough for them to know, before they have finished their course, and are prepared to take possession of the inheritance of the saints in light.

It now remains to improve and to apply the subject.

1. It appears from what has been said, that all the knowledge which christians have of themselves in a future state, they wholly derive from divine revelation. The gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light, teaches them that after they leave the body they shall exist; that they shall be where God is; that they shall be like him; that they shall see him as he is, and be happy; but they could never have discovered these things by the mere light of nature. This is evident from their total ignorance of every thing respecting their future state, which God has not revealed in his word. They have no knowledge of the means by which they shall be able to move, to see, or to converse, in the world of spirits. And in respect to these things, all the rest of mankind are equally ignorant, though some have exerted all their intellectual powers and faculties to discover them. Christians are entirely indebted to divine revelation for all that they know about the invisible world, more than those who are sitting in the region of the shadow of death. The apostle hence concludes, that if they could once lose their belief of the gospel, they would thereby lose all their hopes of future happiness, and become of all men the most miserable. This is a good reason why David and all good men should so highly venerate and esteem the word of God, which contains such important truths, and opens such glorious prospects beyond the grave.

2. We may learn from what has been said, why some christians die in so much light and joy, and some in so much darkness and distress. Some of the patriarchs, and some of the apostles, died in the lively exercises of faith and hope. They

believed what God had revealed concerning the holiness and happiness of heaven; they beheld the promises afar off, and embraced them. And some christians, since their days, have died in the same believing and joyful manner. They have felt and conversed like Jacob, and Joseph, and David, and Simeon, and Paul, in the near and full view of eternity. They have looked upon the bright side of death, which banished all gloomy and distressing apprehensions of the king of terrors. And it appears from what christians do or may know about their future state, that they may see something worth dying for, and really desire to be absent from the body, that they may be present with the Lord. They may, like Stephen, have such views of Christ and of the glories of heaven, as to fear no evil in passing through the dark valley, and exchanging time for eternity. But such triumphant deaths have always, perhaps, been very rare. More generally, real christians approach the grave, and the borders of the invisible world, with a fearful and trembling heart. And this may be partly owing to their looking upon death on the dark side, and pondering upon what they do not and cannot know about exchanging worlds. When they look into the grave, they have not faith and fortitude enough to look through it into the world of light. This is not unfrequently the case of those who have lived apparently, and perhaps really, very holy and exemplary lives. Probably the great adversary takes advantage of their natural timidity, and paints upon their imaginations all the dark and unrevealed things respecting an invisible and untried state. This we may charitably hope is one cause, at least, why many visibly pious persons die in so much darkness and distress.

3. Christians may and ought to infer from what has been said, the great importance of making their calling and election sure. This is a duty which they are extremely apt to neglect, and to plead inability as an excuse for their negligence. But their excuse is groundless, because God has graciously given them in his word plain and infallible marks of a filial spirit, by which they may certainly know that they are born again, and are heirs of the kingdom of glory. The apostle speaks plainly and conclusively upon this subject. "For," he says, "as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." It is very easy to understand and to apply this rule of trial. Any man may know that he loves his friend, by the exercise of a

friendly spirit. Any child may know that he loves his earthly parent, by the exercise of a filial spirit. In the same manner, any christian may know that he loves God, by the exercise of the spirit of adoption. A filial spirit carries its own evidence with it. All real christians feel a filial spirit towards their heavenly Father, by which they may know that they are the children of God, and heirs of everlasting life. It is a duty which they owe to God and to themselves, to examine their own hearts impartially, and know what manner of spirit they are of; for, without knowing this, they will all their life-time be subject to bondage, through fear of death; and they may expect when that comes, their sun will set in a cloud, and bring a reproach upon themselves, and upon the religion which they have professed. But if they faithfully search their own hearts, and discover their filial spirit towards God, they may read the promises in their favor, and view death on the light side, which will give them a complete victory over their last enemy, and afford the best source of consolation to their best friends, who stand around their dying bed.

4. The preceding observations leave us no room to doubt, that death is always a happy event to the children of God. We know enough about their future state, to be satisfied that whenever and however they may die, they actually gain by their great and last change. God has told us that as soon as they leave this world, they are carried to a better, where they are completely holy and happy. Though they may be troubled with doubts and fears, and dread to meet the king of terrors, yet he who began a good work in their hearts, never fails to own them for his children, and to give them their promised inheritance. To exclude all possibility of doubt upon this interesting point, the apostle has said, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

5. This subject affords a source of great consolation to those who have been bereaved of near and dear christian friends. They have suffered a great loss, and experienced a painful separation, which justly calls for mourning and sorrow; but if they will only carry their thoughts into that world where they believe their friends are gone, and view them in their present state of glory and felicity, their sorrows must be mingled with joys. Can they mourn that those whom they esteemed as the children of God and the excellent of the earth, have become unspeakably more excellent, more amiable, and more happy, than they ever were in this imperfect state? Can they really

believe what the gospel reveals concerning the spirits of just men made perfect, and yet mourn that their pious friends have actually joined the general assembly and church of the first-born, in the delightful service of their divine Redeemer? If they do not refuse to be comforted, they must derive peculiar consolation from what they know of the past conduct and present state of dear departed christians, who have ceased from sin and suffering, and are in the full enjoyment of all good.

I presume I shall now have the concurrence of this whole assembly, in applying these consoling observations to the numerous mourners on this occasion. Numerous mourners, I say, because there is not, perhaps, a single person here present, who does not lament the decease of that amiable and excellent child of God, whose remains now lie before us. I have endeavored to delineate that filial spirit which constitutes and adorns the christian character; and can any one recollect a single trait in that character, which does not plainly apply to Mrs. WILDER? Without mistaking nature for grace, and making every proper allowance for her native mildness, her superior education, and her polished manners, did she not discover, in the whole course of her conduct, that love to God, that love to Christ, that love to the friends of Christ, and that universal love to mankind, which are the genuine expressions of a holy and humble heart? What duty to God, what duty to her husband, what duty to her friends, or what duty to her enemies, (if she had any,) did she habitually neglect? She exhibited in her very countenance that meek and quiet spirit, that serenity and peace of mind, which naturally flow from vital piety. There is, therefore, just ground to believe that she has safely reached her heavenly Father's house, and is there fixed as a pillar in his temple for ever. In this firm belief, the bereaved and afflicted PASTOR of this church has no cause to sorrow, as those who have no hope. Though his loss is greatly enhanced by all the amiable, useful and virtuous qualities which adorned the dear wife of his youth, whom God has taken away, yet he has abundant reason to be thankful that her life, which had been so often threatened, was continued so long in mercy to him, and to his numerous family. May he sing aright of mercy and of judgment. May he hear the rod, and who hath appointed it. With a filial spirit, may he bow in cheerful submission to his heavenly Father, and cast all his burdens upon his arm, who is able and willing to sustain him.

The bereaved and sorely afflicted children call for the sympathy and compassion of every tender heart. They have sustained a great and irreparable loss. Their dear mother has left

them at the very season, when they stand in peculiar need of her care, of her instruction, of her example, and I may add, of her prayers. But they may derive great and lasting benefit from her life and from her death, if they will only remember her instructions, her warnings and admonitions, and faithfully follow her bright example in every thing which is pious, amiable and praise-worthy in the christian character. Their duty, safety and happiness unitedly call upon them, to commit themselves to their father's and their mother's God, to whom they have been solemnly and publicly devoted. Let them feel and express a filial spirit towards their heavenly Father, and he will take them under his care, guide all their steps, support them under all their trials and bereavements, and finally wipe away all tears from their eyes.

This church and congregation will sincerely sympathize with their bereaved pastor, under the heavy loss which they, as well as he, have sustained, by the death of Mrs. Wilder, whom they have long and highly respected. While they lament that so bright an example of piety and virtue has been removed from them, they will remember that they must in their turns, one after another, follow her to the grave, and go into that invisible world whither she is gone, and from whence she will never return. May this solemn admonition of Providence happily serve to quicken all of every age and character, to be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Amen.

# SERMON X.

## SUBMISSION TO DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

DEATH OF DEACON ROBERT GILLMORE.

BEHOLD, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?—JOB, ix. 12

JOB was afflicted not more for his own benefit, than for the benefit of others. God intended his scenes of sorrow should draw forth the feelings of his heart, and display his true character before the eyes of the world. And agreeably to this purpose he directed, that both his afflictions and his conduct under them, should be recorded and transmitted to future ages, that mankind might hear of the patience of Job, and see the end of the Lord, in his fatherly chastisements. His discourses with his friends gave him a good opportunity of justifying the sovereignty of God, in the dispensations of his providence. This was the principal subject of dispute between them. They insisted that God treated every man according to his real character, in his providential conduct towards him; but he maintained that God acted as a sovereign, without any design of distinguishing his friends from his enemies, by outward mercies and afflictions. Accordingly, in the preceding verses, he gives a striking description of divine sovereignty, which he owns he had too often disregarded, but now most sensibly realized. And in the text he seems to wonder that any should not both realize, and cordially submit to the sovereignty of God. "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?" These words present to our serious consideration this plain truth,

It is the natural tendency of afflictions to make the friends of God realize and submit to his sovereignty.

I shall first consider the natural tendency of afflictions to give the friends of God a realizing sense of his sovereignty; and, secondly, consider the natural tendency of this realizing sense of divine sovereignty to bring them to unreserved submission.

I. Let us consider the natural tendency of afflictions to give the friends of God a realizing sense of his sovereignty.

This is one of the essential and most amiable attributes of the Deity, which he continually displays in dispensing both good and evil to mankind. But saints, as well as sinners, are very apt to suffer God to pass by them unheeded in the course of providence, and to forget that he holds them and all their temporal and eternal interests in his holy and sovereign hand. This stupidity good men always lament, when they are awakened to realize his sovereignty. Job in his affliction could say, "God is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Who removeth the mountains, and they know not: who overturneth them in his anger. Who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Who commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. Who alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Who doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number." These bright and glorious manifestations of divine sovereignty, he tells us in the next verse, he disregarded in the days of his prosperity. "Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not: he passeth on also, but I perceive him not." But when God laid his heavy hand upon him, he cries out with great sensibility, "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, what doest thou?"

Now, afflictions always display the sovereignty of God, and of course naturally tend to make his friends realize it. No afflictions for the present are joyous, but grievous, and never in their own nature desirable. Whenever God afflicts his children, he displays his sovereignty over them, and gives a practical and sensible evidence, that he has a right to dispose of them contrary to their views, their desires, and most tender feelings. But of all afflictions, those which are called bereavements, give the clearest display of divine sovereignty. These constrained Job to turn his attention to this awful and amiable attribute of the Deity. "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him?" He had taken away Job's comforts one after another, until he had nearly stripped him of every earthly enjoyment. Though he had given him the bounties of his providence in sovereignty, yet he displayed his sovereignty in a clearer and stronger light, by taking them away in such a

sudden and unexpected manner. The reason of this is obvious. Mankind naturally think that they have a right to all they possess. After blessings are put into their hands, they imagine they have a right to hold them. They do not make the same claim to favors not yet received. These they are more ready to allow that God has a right to grant or to deny. But their children, and friends, and other outward comforts, which are in their possession, they are extremely apt to claim as their own. By bereavements, therefore, God practically declares that he is greater than man; and has a supreme right to take away any thing, and even every thing, which he has in mere mercy given him. God means to display his sovereignty in the most sensible manner to those whom he bereaves of enjoyments, to which they were the most attached, and to which they laid the strongest claim. Hence it is the natural tendency of afflictions in general, and of bereavements in particular, to make the friends of God realize his absolute sovereignty. Under bereavements, the sovereignty of God is the most prominent perfection of his nature, and appears to comprehend and absorb all his other perfections. It meets the afflicted and bereaved at every corner and in every object. It appears to be displayed so plainly every where, that they are astonished that they could ever overlook it any where.

Though the friends of God, under the smiles of providence, sometimes lose a sense of divine sovereignty, yet there is an aptitude in them to realize it, when it is clearly displayed by afflictions and bereavements. They have had such a lively sense of God's right to save, or to destroy their souls for ever, that trials, afflictions, and bereavements, naturally revive a realizing sense of his sovereignty in giving or taking away any inferior favors. I now proceed to show,

II. That such a realizing sense of the sovereignty of God in afflictions, has a natural tendency to excite true submission in every pious heart. "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him?" This expresses a lively sense of divine sovereignty. "Who will say unto him, What doest thou?" This equally expresses unreserved submission to divine sovereignty. While Job realized the absolute sovereignty of God in taking away his dearest enjoyments, it appeared so reasonable and so easy to submit to him, that he seemed to think it impossible for him or any other person to refuse submission. "Who will say unto him, What doest thou?" Such a realizing sense of divine sovereignty always has a natural tendency to bring good men to unreserved submission, under the correcting hand of God. For,

1. While they realize the nature of his sovereignty, they

cannot help seeing the true ground or reason of submission. His sovereignty results from his supremacy. He is supreme in every natural and moral excellence, which gives him an absolute right and power to act independently of all other beings in the universe. When he acts as a sovereign, he neither solicits their assistance, nor asks their advice, nor consults their views, their desires, or their feelings. Hence his sovereignty is omnipotent and irresistible. In the exercise of it, he overturneth and removeth mountains; he shaketh the earth out of its place; he stoppeth the sun in its course, and sealeth up the stars. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble, and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?" "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him?" It must be reasonable to submit to such omnipotent sovereignty, because it is presumption to resist, or to say to him who is mighty in power, "What doest thou?" "Whoever hardened himself against him, and prospered?" God is wise in heart, and his sovereignty is always exercised agreeably to his unerring wisdom. Though he does not give to any of his creatures the reasons of his conduct, yet he always has good, yea, the best reasons for his most mysterious and sovereign dispensations of providence. He acts in the clear and comprehensive view of all things past, present, and to come. It is morally impossible that he should ever make a designed or undesigned mistake, in any of his dealings towards his intelligent creatures. His sovereignty consists in acting from wiser reasons than the united wisdom of angels and men could suggest. And surely it becomes them to submit their finite to his infinite understanding, and their erring to his unerring wisdom. Besides, the sovereignty of God is not only omnipotent and omniscient, but perfectly benevolent. God is love, and his love dictates every sovereign act of his providence. He is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works; and, "as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." He displays paternal tenderness when he taketh away, as well as when he giveth. In a word, his sovereignty displays the bright assemblage of all his natural and moral perfections. It has a natural tendency, therefore, to bow the hearts of all his friends to unreserved submission. It is indeed the only thing which lays them under moral obligation to submit to his disposing will. If he did not act as a wise, benevolent, and omnipotent sovereign, or if he were under the least influence of any other being, in the dispensations of providence, he would not be worthy of their cordial and unreserved submission. But when

they realize the nature and perfection of his sovereignty, they are sweetly constrained to feel and say as Job did, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?"

2. God designs to bring his children to submission, when he gives them a realizing sense of his holy and righteous sovereignty. He can excite other gracious affections in their hearts, by other means. He can awaken their love, their gratitude and praise, by his word, or by his ordinances, or by the smiles of his providence. But nothing short of a realizing sense of his sovereignty under his correcting hand, is sufficient to bring them to submission. Whenever he throws them in the dust, sinks them in sorrow, and tears from their hearts the dear objects of their affections, he means to bring them to a cordial resignation to his sovereignty. It is only, if need be, that he ever afflicts and bereaves them. But there would be no occasion for his bringing them into the furnace of affliction, if any thing besides a realizing sense of his sovereignty would soften their hearts to submission. And since he makes use of this severe method to reduce them to an humble, submissive spirit, we may well suppose that this is the method which has the most natural tendency to produce this effect in their hearts. God always employs the most proper means to accomplish his own designs. It is certain, however, that we cannot conceive of any thing better adapted to lead saints to submission, than a realizing sense of divine sovereignty. And it seems that God himself knew of no better method to bring his ancient people to proper views and feelings. "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold I will melt them and try them: for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?" But it will more fully appear, that a realizing sense of the sovereignty of God naturally tends to lead his friends to unreserved submission, if we consider,

3. That it has so often produced this desirable effect in their hearts. Though they have sometimes murmured and repined under afflictions, yet a realizing sense of God's sovereign right to dispose of them has eventually brought them to a cheerful resignation to his will. Job no sooner heard of the complicated evils brought upon him, than he saw the sovereign hand of God in them, which instantaneously reduced him to perfect resignation. Then Job answered and said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." Though after this, he frequently felt and expressed hard and murmuring thoughts of God, yet a realizing view of divine sovereignty as frequently tranquillized his mind, and softened it into submission. When God demanded, "Shall

he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it: — Then Job answered the Lord and said, Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no farther." God continues, however, to proclaim his sovereignty by a series of pointed and awful interrogations. "Then Job answered the Lord and said again, I know that thou canst do every thing. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Such was the effect of a realizing sense of God's sovereignty upon the heart of Job; it silenced all his objections, restrained all his opposition, and prostrated him in silent submission at the foot of his Maker.

When Samuel denounced the displeasure of God against Eli, and foretold the dire calamities coming upon him, his pious mind instantly turned upon the sovereignty of God, which bowed his will to the divine will. Having heard the dreadful message which was designed to make his ears and the ears of all Israel to tingle, he solemnly paused, and then uttered these memorable words: "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." His submission was unreserved; he was willing to bear whatever a holy and sovereign God should please to lay upon him.

God bereaved Aaron of two sons in one day, on a solemn occasion, and in an awful manner. Though his case was distressing beyond description, yet Moses admonished him to suppress every token of sorrow, and conduct with that calmness and submission which became the dignity of his sacred office. Aaron conducted accordingly. The account is this. "Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace." His silence spoke louder than words, and emphatically said, "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?"

God's dealings with the Shunammite were designed to display his sovereignty and her submission. He gave her a son in sovereignty, and in sovereignty took him away. When she was suddenly and unexpectedly bereaved of her darling child, she went to the man of God for direction and relief. But he declined to see her or hear her speak, and sent his servant to ask her, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well." She realized, she loved, and she submitted to the sovereignty of God.

A realizing sense of the sovereignty of God in afflicting and bereaving David, led him to feel and to express the genuine spirit of submission. He was able to say unto God, in the sincerity of his heart, after he had gone through the fiery trial, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it."

While Paul was returning from a long journey to Jerusalem, a certain prophet named Agabus forewarned him of the danger of returning to that city. Whereupon all his friends unitedly entreated him to desist from his purpose. But he was so entirely reconciled to the sovereignty of God in the dispensations of providence, that he reproved and rejected their unsubmissive advice. "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep, and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, they ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done." Thus the friends of God under his afflictive and chastising hand, realize his amiable sovereignty, which brings them to submit cheerfully and unreservedly to his disposing will.

It now remains to improve and apply the subject.

1. If all afflictions are designed and adapted to bring men to a cordial submission to divine sovereignty, then all true submission must be in its own nature absolute and unreserved. It must be like the object upon which it terminates, or towards which it is exercised. The sovereignty of God, which results from his absolute supremacy, can admit of no limitations. He can no more be limited in dispensing evil, than in dispensing good, to mankind. He has an equal and unlimited right to dispose of every one of the human race, and to order the outward circumstances of every person in the world, just as he pleases. He may send prosperity to one, and adversity to another. He may afflict the rich or the poor, the high or the low, the godly or ungodly, in what way, or in what measure, he sees best. Where he has given much, there he may take away much. Those whom he has distinguished by great favors, he may distinguish by as great afflictions. His right to afflict is entirely unlimited, and of consequence, all submission under his afflictive hand must be absolute and unreserved. The afflicted may never say unto him, "What doest thou?" nor even desire to stay his correcting hand. There can be no reserve in submission, because reserve would be, in its own nature, an exercise of sovereignty, rather than an exercise of resignation. While a person feels truly submissive to God, he is as really willing that he should take away one favor as another, and all that he has given him, as a part. For he loves and approves of that very sovereignty, which is altogether absolute

and unlimited. Abraham, in the exercise of submission, was as really willing that God should take away Isaac, as any other child he had. Eli, in the exercise of submission, was as really willing that God should destroy the whole, as a part of his family. David, when he fled from his son, and relinquished his throne and his kingdom, was as really willing that God should deprive him of all, as of a part of these earthly enjoyments. And our Lord himself, in the exercise of submission, was as really willing to die a cruel and ignominious, as any other death. All the friends of God are as really willing that he should afflict them at one time as another, in one way as another, and in the highest as well as in the lowest degree. Their submission is as unreserved, as his sovereignty is unlimited.

2. If a realizing sense of the sovereignty of God leads his friends to submit to it in this world, then we must suppose that it will lead them to submit to it in the world to come. Divine sovereignty is as unlimited in duration, as in extent. It will be displayed in time to come, as it has been in time past; and it will be far more clearly displayed, when time shall be no more. In a future state it will be seen, not only in afflicting good and bad men while passing through life, but in forming their diametrically opposite characters, and fitting them for their diametrically different conditions through eternity. There all the objects of divine election, and of divine reprobation, will appear together, and in the most striking contrast. There it will be seen that one parent was taken and another left, one child taken and another left, one friend taken and another left. There God will confer everlasting good upon one person, and inflict everlasting evil upon another. There it will appear that all the dispensations of providence in this world were designed to lay, and did actually lay, a foundation for endless joy and endless sorrow. And who can doubt whether it will not be as trying to a parent, to see a child die an eternal as a temporal death; or as trying to a child to see a parent die an eternal as a temporal death; or as trying to a husband, to see a wife die an eternal as a temporal death; or as trying to a wife, to see a husband die an eternal as a temporal death; or as trying to a friend, to see a friend die an eternal as a temporal death? The final separation of the wicked from the righteous will excite unspeakably higher sensibility in their pious hearts, than any separation, bereavement, or affliction ever did, while they were passing through the fiery trials of their probationary state. And in this case it is certain, that their sensibility must be either submissive or unsubmissive. It must not and it cannot be unsubmissive; but it must be, and it will be, perfectly submissive. The bright and brightening displays of divine sovereignty will perpetually

awaken and increase their love to it, and sweetly constrain them to sing, "Amen, Alleluia," while they are continually beholding the smoke of the torments of the damned ascending for ever and ever. The friends of God will be cordially and unreservedly submissive to his sovereignty, as long as they and he shall exist.

3. If a realizing sense of divine sovereignty naturally tends to lead men to an unconditional submission to God, then this doctrine ought to be plainly taught and inculcated. Many wish that preachers would keep this divine attribute out of their sight as much as possible, because it is, of all others, the most offensive to their selfish hearts. They are willing to have all the natural and moral perfections of the Deity exhibited before them, so far as it can be done without bringing his sovereignty into view. They are willing that God should be almighty, if they might direct the exercise of his omnipotence. They are willing that God should be infinitely wise, if they might direct the exercise of his wisdom. They are willing that God should be perfectly holy, just and good, if they might direct the exercise of his holiness, justice and goodness. They are willing that God should govern the whole universe, if they might direct him how to govern it for their own benefit. In a word, they are willing that God should exist, and exercise all the perfections of his nature, if he would cease to be sovereign, and suffer himself to be under their controlling influence. But this is naturally and morally impossible, because he can no more cease to be or to act as a sovereign, than he can cease to be God. If ministers, therefore, would preach in the most instructive and profitable manner to saints and sinners, they must exhibit the sovereignty of God, in the fullest, clearest and strongest light. This is necessary in order to give their people just views of the true character of God, and to bring them to an unreserved submission to all the dispensations of providence and grace, which is the great end to be answered by preaching. How often does God himself say in his word, that he visits mankind with signal mercies and wasting judgments, that they may know that he is the Lord? And surely, if he means to make his sovereignty appear in all his conduct, ministers ought not to shun to declare it in all their preaching. They cannot preach any doctrine which is more perfectly adapted to reach the hearts and consciences of their hearers, and to prepare them to glorify and enjoy God for ever.

4. If afflictions are designed and suited to make men realize divine sovereignty, then they always try their hearts, whether they are friendly or unfriendly to God. While he pours the blessings of providence into their bosoms, and gives them

uninterrupted prosperity, they are all apt to think that they love him in sincerity. But when he treats them as a sovereign, and visits them with the rod of affliction, then he tries their sincerity. If they are sincere, they will submit to his sovereignty; but if they are insincere, they will hate and oppose it. As God never lets men know whether he is afflicting them for their own good, or for their neighbors' good, or for their enemies' good, or for the general good, so he always means to try their hearts, and draw forth their benevolent or selfish feelings. He led his people of old through the wilderness, to try them, and see what was in their hearts. And the means he used answered the end he proposed. His friends submitted, but his enemies rebelled. Afflictions always produce these different effects in the hearts of saints and sinners. Those who sincerely love God are willing that he should answer his own purposes, in casting them into the furnace of affliction. They feel as he feels. He desires to answer the best ends by their afflictions, and they desire the same. They feel that unreserved submission to God that Job felt when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." But when those who are destitute of grace are afflicted, and realize that God designs to give them all the pain and anguish they endure, they find that they have a carnal mind, which will not submit to divine sovereignty. They inwardly say that he who made them shall not reign over them. They would fain flee out of his hand. Afflictions equally try the hearts of both the friends and enemies of God, and give them the best opportunity to know what manner of persons they are.

5. If afflictions are designed and calculated to bring the friends of God to a cordial submission to his sovereignty, then they will eventually do them good. God always makes the means he uses answer the ends which he intends they shall answer. And he tells us that he means to teach his people to profit by all his fatherly chastisements. He says that all things shall work together for good to them that love him. He says that their light afflictions shall work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. He assures them that whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Though real saints sometimes murmur, and complain of God under his chastising hand, yet they finally fall at his feet, submit to his sovereignty, and become partakers of his holiness. Job alternately submitted and murmured, but at last he cheerfully and unreservedly submitted to the rectitude and wisdom of the divine conduct towards him, which answered the very end that he had desired and expected in the days of his adversity. In that dark and gloomy season he said, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I

cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." David gratefully acknowledges that he had found peculiar benefit from the afflictive hand of God. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now I have kept thy word." God has often reclaimed, purified and comforted his children, by means of sore and heavy afflictions. And it is always to be expected that they will all eventually find great spiritual advantage from his fatherly chastisements. This the apostle suggests to christians for their consolation under their fiery trials. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

Finally, this discourse applies, with peculiar propriety, to the family and friends of the late Deacon GILLMORE. We presume that it was the prayer of every christian, and the desire of every person, in this place, that his languishing health might be restored, and his valuable life might be continued for many years. He was universally and justly beloved. His peaceable disposition, his native modesty, his uniform piety, and his prudent, inoffensive deportment, gained the hearts of this people. Though he was called to act in a variety of civil, military and religious offices, yet he so manifestly endeavored to serve God and his generation, that he not only escaped the censure, but secured the esteem and approbation of the public. But notwithstanding the prayers and desires of his friends and family, God has put a period to his life and usefulness, in the midst of his days. It becomes us to be dumb, and not open our mouths, because he has done it. He has seen better reasons for shortening his life, than we could see for lengthening it out. And perhaps his principal design in this instance of mortality was, to bring us to a cordial and unreserved submission to his amiable and absolute sovereignty.

It certainly becomes this church to be humble and submissive under the sovereign hand of God, who has diminished their number and weakened their strength, by taking away a member and officer, whose service they not only desired, but peculiarly needed. As this circumstance displays the sovereignty of God, so it lays them under peculiar obligations to look to him for his special direction in the path of duty. Let

it be their heart's desire and prayer to God, that he would completely repair the breach he has made among them.

Not only the church, but the people, and especially those in the meridian of life, ought to be deeply affected with the death of a man, whose face they beheld, whose voice they heard, and whose company they enjoyed, with a great deal of pleasure. He has taught them how to live, and how to die. He has left them an example which they may follow with safety and advantage, by which, though dead, he now speaketh. And whoever will live as he lived, may hope to die as he died, in favor with God and man.

The bereaved widow has much occasion to mourn, but not to mourn as those who have no hope. She has ground to believe that her dear departed husband has met with the approbation of God, which is infinitely better than the approbation of man. This is a consolation which ought to melt her heart in gratitude as well as submission. God is giving her an opportunity to realize his sovereignty, and to exercise that supreme affection to him which she has publicly professed to have. If she will now keep covenant with God, he will keep covenant with her, and grant her covenant mercies. As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. If she will only cast her burdens upon his arm, she may possess her soul in peace, and humbly hope that this sore bereavement and fiery trial will work for her a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The fatherless children are capable of feeling and duly estimating the great loss they have sustained, by the death of a dear and indulgent parent. After holding them long in doubtful expectation, God has brought upon them the evil they feared. He has taken away, and they could not hinder him; and will they now presume to say unto him, "What doest thou?" It becomes them to bow in silent and cordial submission to his holy and righteous sovereignty. They ought to be thankful that God graciously preserved the life of their father, until they have come to years of discretion and self-direction. It is now their indispensable duty to remember his instructions and counsels, and to imitate every thing amiable in his character and conduct. God has of late been striving with them by his Spirit, and he is now striving with them by his providence. If they will now hear his voice, let them not harden their hearts, but acquaint themselves with him, and be at peace, and thereby good shall come unto them. Amen.

# SERMON XI.

## HOPE IN DEATH.

DEATH OF MR. OLIVER SHEPHERD, OF WRENTHAM, OCTOBER 14, 1814, IN HIS 27TH YEAR.

But the righteous hath hope in his death. — Prov. xiv. 32.

Hope is the principal source of happiness to all mankind, while they are passing through the shifting scenes of this present life. There is, however, a wide difference between the hopes of the righteous and the hopes of the wicked. The wicked place their hopes upon uncertain and unsatisfying objects, which subject them to continual disappointments in life, and never fail to plunge them deep in despair, in the hour of death. But the righteous build their hopes upon spiritual and divine objects, which never disappoint them in life, nor forsake them at death; but, in that most serious crisis, afford them "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast; and which entereth into that within the vail." This contrast between hope and despair, in the article of death, is emphatically expressed in the verse which contains the text. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death."

It is proposed, in the present discourse, to describe the character here mentioned, and to illustrate the truth here asserted.

I. I shall describe the character of the righteous.

The inspired writers divide all mankind into two, and but two, essentially different classes, and distinguish them by the different appellations of the righteous and the wicked. This distinction runs through the whole Bible, but is more constantly kept up in the writings of Solomon than in any other parts of the scripture. He generally exhibits these two oppo-

site characters in contrast with each other, which sets them both in the most conspicuous and striking light.

The peculiar distinction between the righteous and the wicked lies in the heart, and not in the understanding. The righteous possess that holiness of heart of which the wicked are entirely destitute. They are in a state of nature, and dead in trespasses and sins. They have a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. Selfishness reigns in their hearts, and makes them enemies to all righteousness. But the righteous have a new heart and a new spirit. They put off the old man, which is corrupt, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. They give God the supreme affection of their hearts, and delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man. They renounce all self-righteousness and self-dependence, and rely alone upon the atonement of Christ, as the ground of pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. They renounce the world and the things of the world, and choose God for their supreme portion. As they are new creatures, so they walk in newness of life. They express their love to God and to man, in all the various ways which the gospel requires. They live in the habitual practice of all godliness and honesty. They perform all the duties of devotion, whether secret, private or public, from day to day and from Sabbath to Sabbath. They cordially unite with the friends of God in espousing his cause, and promoting the prosperity of Zion. They do good to all men as they have opportunity, but especially to the household of faith. They live not to themselves, but to him who died for them, and redeemed them by his blood. They feel and act as pilgrims and strangers in the world, and plainly declare, by their uniform conduct, that they are looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. These are some of the peculiar traits in the character of the righteous which distinguish them from the wicked.

II. I proceed to illustrate the truth asserted in the text: "The righteous hath hope in his death."

This assertion is true, as it respects righteous persons in general, though there may be some apparent exceptions. The righteous, as well as others, may leave the world under various circumstances. Some may die so suddenly, as to have no time for reflection or anticipation. Some may die in such a state of debility or derangement, as to be incapable of exercising either hope or fear. Some may die under the hidings of God's face, and involved in darkness respecting their gracious state, which may deprive them of peace and hope. Still it is true of all the

righteous, that they have a solid foundation of hope, which death can neither shake, nor destroy. But as I have just observed, it is generally the happy lot of the righteous, to have hope in their death. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, died in hope. David closed his life in a lively hope of future blessedness. These were his last words: "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire." Simeon waited in hope of his dying hour, and prayed for its speedy approach. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Stephen expired, beholding the glories of heaven, and "calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit." Paul's hope was enlivened and strengthened in a near and realizing view of death. He said, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." It was so common in David's day, for the righteous to die in hope, that he appeals to ocular evidence in proof of it. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." How many men of eminent piety, in every part of the christian world, have finished their course in the full assurance of hope! Though there is no occasion for saying any thing more to establish the truth that the righteous have hope in their death, yet it may be proper and useful to inquire, why the righteous have hope in that solemn hour which involves the wicked in utter darkness and despair. There is one plain and sufficient reason to be given for this peculiar circumstance in the death of the righteous; it is because there is nothing preceding, attending or following death, which can destroy the foundation of their hope.

First. A clear and just sense of their guilt and ill desert in the sight of God, cannot destroy their hope in Christ. The prospect of death very naturally awakens in the minds of men a consciousness of their great and numerous offences, and of the justice of that law which they have broken, and by which they are condemned. The apostle says, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." Death brings a sting to the consciences of the wicked, who have spent their lives in doing nothing but what has been displeasing to God and a transgression of his righteous law. Their sins appear to them in their nature, in their number, and in their peculiar

aggravations. They are alarmed at the justice of God, which may execute the penalty of the law upon them, and drive them away in their wickedness to hopeless ruin. This kills all their former flattering hopes, which they had built upon their own imaginary goodness, or upon the boundless mercy of God. But though the prospect of death gives the righteous as strong and as realizing a sense of their great criminality, yet they have had such a sense of it before, and have loathed and abhorred themselves for all their transgressions. Though they have a clear sight of the justice of God, which might pursue them to endless destruction, yet they have had such a sight of it before, and cordially accepted the punishment of their iniquity, and judged and condemned themselves, as the divine law judges and condemns them. And though they are fully convinced that they have nothing to recommend them to the mercy of God but wretchedness and guilt, yet they have before given up all their self-righteousness and self-dependence, and placed their whole trust in the atoning blood of Christ, to recommend them to the pardoning mercy of their offended sovereign. They know, as the apostle did, whom they have believed, and are persuaded that he is able to keep that which they have committed to him against that day. They believe that though their sins have abounded, yet the grace of God can much more abound. This enables them to say with the primitive christians, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." That sense of sin and guilt which destroys the hope of the impenitent unbeliever, cannot destroy the hope of the penitent believer, in the hour of death.

Secondly. There is nothing in the thoughts of leaving this world, which can destroy the hope of the righteous. The wicked dread this circumstance of death. The very thought of leaving the world drinks up all their spirits, and destroys all their hopes. To leave the world is to leave all their treasures upon which they have built all their hopes; and when their treasures are lost, all their hopes and happiness must perish. What ground of hope had Dives, when he saw death approaching to strip him of all his affluence and grandeur? What ground of hope had the wealthy worldling, when God told him, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee?" What ground of hope can any of the men of the world have, when God shall take away their souls? Whenever death appears near and certain, it must fill their hearts with anguish and despair. But the righteous have nothing to fear from

leaving the world. They would not live alway. They place their hope in God, and can address him in the language of the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee?" They are crucified to the world, and the world to them, by the cross of Christ. They have a more enduring substance than the world can afford. They have a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them. They have seen, and realized, and renounced, the vanities of the world. They have really complied with that indispensable condition of salvation which Christ has required. For they have in their hearts, forsaken houses, and brethren, and sisters, and father, and mother, and wife, and children, and lands, and every thing they have in this world, that in the world to come they may inherit everlasting life. They have nothing to give up at death, but what they have given up before. They have nothing to lose, but every thing to gain, by leaving the world; and of consequence, the prospect of death cannot destroy, but only strengthen and enliven their hope.

Thirdly. There is nothing in the prospect of having a more constant and realizing sense of the divine presence, which can destroy the hope of the righteous at the hour of death. Sinners say unto God, "Depart from us." If it were in their power, they would entirely banish from their minds a realizing sense of the divine presence. But death brings God near to them, which damps all the vain hopes which they had cherished and lived upon in the days of health and stupidity. The thought of appearing before God, and of realizing his holy presence, destroys every gleam of hope. They cannot conceive of enjoying the least degree of happiness, after death has removed all the objects of this world from their view, and fixed their whole attention upon God, whose presence they cannot shun, and whose wrath they cannot endure. But there is nothing in the prospect of going into the more immediate presence of God after death, which has the least tendency to destroy the hope of the righteous. They have been with God before. They know what it is to draw near to God, and to have God draw near to them. They love to see God every day, every where, and in every thing; and more especially in his sanctuary. Hear the language of David, who speaks the language of all the people of God upon this subject. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul

longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: When shall I come and appear before God?" The righteous, who love the temple of God in this world, desire to be fixed as pillars in his temple above. They long to be absent from the body, that they may be present with the Lord. David lived and died in the pleasing hope of enjoying the blissful presence of God for ever. "I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." "I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." The prospect of death cannot destroy, but must necessarily consummate, the hope of the righteous that they shall be translated into the immediate and beatific presence of God.

Fourthly. The prospect which death presents to the righteous of being forever united with perfectly holy creatures, cannot destroy their hope. The wicked hate heaven on account of its holy inhabitants. They could not enjoy themselves a moment in the society of holy angels and of the spirits of just men made perfect. "An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in his ways is abomination to the wicked." Hence the apostle demands, "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?—or what part hath he that believeth, with an infidel?" The hearts of the wicked are in perfect contrariety to the hearts of the righteous, which totally disqualifies them for the holy and happy society of heaven, and completely fits them for the society of the unholy and unhappy prisoners of despair. The prospect of such an everlasting separation between the righteous and the wicked, will destroy the hope of the wicked, while it will strengthen and confirm the hope of the righteous. They dread, as David did, that God should gather their souls with the wicked, and ardently desire and hope to be where the wicked shall cease from troubling, and the weary shall be at rest. When the time of their departure is at hand, and they are waiting for death, they find a peculiar pleasure in looking through the grave up to the world of light, where they hope to be soon united with the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, and all the children of God, in their Father's house. They can hardly conceive of any happiness, which is superior to the felicity which they hope to derive from the love, the harmony, and the uninter-

rupted society of the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven. Death, which opens such a bright and glorious prospect into the heavenly world, is suited to remove the doubts and fears, and to confirm the hopes, of the righteous.

Fifthly. There is nothing in the prospect of the holy employments of heaven, which can destroy the hopes of the righteous. To the unrighteous in this life, the duties of private devotion, the services of the sanctuary, and the very Sabbath itself, are a burden and weariness. And when they think of the eternal world, as they sometimes are constrained to do, the prospect of the holy services of heaven destroys all their hope or desire of going thither. Their hearts revolt from the painful idea of spending an endless duration in the holy and humble worship of the sacred Three in One. When death comes to call them away from the busy scenes of life, every ray of hope vanishes; for they are conscious that they cannot be happy either in praising, or blaspheming God, and of course must be completely wretched as long as they exist. But when death comes to the righteous, and opens the prospect of being for ever employed in worshipping and praising their God and Saviour, it fills their hearts with the purest joy and most lively hope. They have found it to be good for them to draw near to God in the duties of devotion. They have seen the glory of God in his sanctuary, and enjoyed divine pleasure in uniting with the assembly of his saints, in paying him the sincere and supreme homage of the heart. They know that death will not destroy their existence, and therefore it cannot destroy their desire and hope of praising God for ever. David believed this, and thankfully acknowledged it before God. "Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live, will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being." The prospect of dying in the Lord, of resting from their labors, and of enjoying one holy and perpetual Sabbath in the kingdom of heaven, instead of destroying the hope of the righteous, removes the gloom of the grave, and fills their hearts with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Sixthly. There is nothing in seeing the displays of divine justice upon the vessels of wrath after death, that can destroy the hope of the righteous. They have seen and approved the justice of God when pointed against themselves, and so are prepared to see and approve the brightest displays of it towards the finally impenitent. Though they do not delight in the death of the wicked, simply considered, yet they do delight, all things considered, in seeing God manifest his holy and just displeasure against the incorrigible enemies of all righteousness.

As Moses and the pious Israelites could bless and praise God for destroying Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea, so the righteous can, with equal benevolence and sincerity, say, "Amen, Alleluia," while they behold God perpetually pouring out the vials of his wrath upon those obstinate enemies who, if they had been able, would have destroyed his kingdom, and all his holy and obedient subjects. God never felt and never will feel the least malevolence towards his irreconcilable enemies, and therefore will never express the least malevolence towards them, while he gives them the due reward of their deeds. Though death will remove the vail which now hides the invisible world, and covers the destruction of the wicked, yet the prospect of this has a tendency to strengthen rather than to weaken the hope of the righteous, that they shall clearly see and sensibly enjoy the justice as well as the mercy of God for ever.

Seventhly. The prospect of seeing all the divine purposes completely accomplished and unfolded, cannot destroy the hope of the righteous when they are going out of time into eternity. This is a dreadful prospect to the wicked, who hate and oppose the eternal and immutable designs of the Deity. But those who habitually live in the exercise of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, sincerely rejoice in the prospect of seeing all the divine purposes fulfilled and explained in the world of light. When Peter could not comprehend the reason of Christ's conduct in a certain instance, "Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." This promise was undoubtedly a source of joy and hope to Peter, as long as he lived, and when he died. The same promise applies to all the righteous, and affords them a solid ground to hope that death will dissipate all the clouds and darkness which have rested upon the dispensations of providence and grace in this life. Now they see through a glass darkly, but after death they shall see face to face: now they know in part, but then shall they know even as also they are known. When the works of creation and providence shall have completed the work of redemption, then all the counsels of God shall be laid open; and the reasons of all his conduct towards all his creatures in every part of his vast dominions, shall be fully explained to the apprehension and satisfaction of his friends, and to the full conviction and utter confusion of his enemies. It is the sincere desire of the righteous, both in life and in death, that God would carry into effect all his wise, holy and gracious designs; and the prospect of their full accomplishment cannot draw a cloud of darkness over their depart-

ing spirits, but will greatly brighten their hopes of seeing the glory of all the divine perfections illustriously displayed to all eternity. I may add,

Eighthly. The prospect of existing for ever cannot prevent the righteous from having hope in their death. The prospect of existing for ever in a future state, carries despair to the wicked at the close of life. But the righteous have hope in their dying hour, that they shall enjoy a blessed immortality beyond the grave. They can adopt the language of the primitive christians, and joyfully say, "We are persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God; an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." While the righteous firmly believe that they shall thus survive the grave, and live for ever in the presence, in the favor, and in the enjoyment of God, and perpetually hold a free and intimate communion with all the holy and blessed spirits of heaven, they must have a lively hope in death, both in respect to themselves, and to all their christian friends, whether they have gone before them, or shall follow after them to the mansions of bliss. This the apostle represents as a consolation peculiar to christians. "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also, which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him." "And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." In the very hour of death, the righteous have a sure and certain hope of a holy and happy existence to all eternity. "The perpetuity of bliss is bliss."

I now pass to the improvement of the subject.

1. If the righteous have hope in their death, then they are essentially different from the wicked. This is a truth which many are very unwilling to admit. They suppose that there is only a gradual difference between the godly and the ungodly. They allow that saints are better than sinners, but they imagine that the only difference between them consists in the degrees of their goodness. They cannot believe that any of mankind are so completely depraved, as to be altogether destitute of moral goodness; and this naturally leads them to conclude that there is no essential difference between the righteous and the wicked. But if the righteous have hope in their death, while the wicked are driven away in despair, then there must be an essential

difference in their moral characters. The characters of all men are in perfect conformity with the objects upon which they place their supreme affections and hopes. If they place their supreme affections and hopes upon holy and virtuous objects, then their real characters are holy and virtuous; but if mere worldly objects hold the highest place in their desires and affections, then their characters are of a diametrically opposite nature. If we could only discover the real objects upon which mankind place their supreme regard and attention, we should never be at a loss about their true characters. Whatever, therefore, most clearly discovers their highest hopes and dependence, must make the greatest discovery of the moral quality of their hearts. And there is nothing which more completely makes this discovery, than a change of circumstances. It was a change of circumstances, which the subtile enemy of mankind supposed would discover the true character of Job; and the great Searcher of hearts consented that his character should be tried by this criterion. God pronounced Job to be a perfect and upright man; but Satan insinuated that a change of circumstances would discover his selfishness and insincerity. The experiment was made; and by the infallible test proposed, Job was proved to be a true and sincere friend to God. It was a change of circumstances, that discovered the selfishness and insincerity of the multitudes who followed Christ from mercenary motives. It was a change of circumstances, that discovered the hypocrisy and avaricious spirit of Judas, and Simon the sorcerer. And it is a change of circumstances, that so often discovers the hearts and characters of men at this day. But there is no change of circumstances, which has so great a tendency to discover the hearts and characters of men, as a sick and dying bed. Multitudes have concealed their supreme affections and hopes from themselves and from the world, until they were brought to this trying situation, when they could no longer wear the mask. If this be true, then the righteous who have hope in that tremendous hour which destroys the hope of the wicked, must be essentially different from them, in their hearts. If the wicked had the least degree of supreme love to God and to Christ, death could not destroy their hope, any more than the hope of the righteous, because it could not destroy the objects of their supreme affection and hope. But if the wicked have not the least degree of supreme love to God and to Christ, then death must remove all the objects of their supreme affection and hope, and so necessarily destroy their hope itself. It is impossible to account for the hope of the righteous and the despair of the wicked, at death, upon any other ground, than the truth of their total depravity of heart. If the wicked had the smallest portion of the oil of grace in

their hearts, their lamps would not go out in the dying hour, when the lamps of the righteous continue to burn, and to give light to themselves and to all around them.

2. If none but the righteous have hope in their death, then there is reason to fear that multitudes will be fatally disappointed in their dying hour. The unrighteous, as well as the righteous, generally entertain a secret hope of escaping the wrath to come, and of obtaining eternal life. But they all build their hopes of heaven upon some false and sandy foundation, which will finally give way, and involve them in disappointment and ruin. Some hope to be saved, because they imagine that their hearts are naturally pure and virtuous; some, because they have lived a sober and regular life; some, because they have had a sense of their depravity and guilt, and been constrained to seek and strive for mercy; some, because they believe that Christ died for them in particular; some, because they have named the name of Christ, and maintained the form of religion, without the power of it; some, because they think that God is too merciful to punish any of his sinful creatures for ever; and some, because they believe Christ died with an intention to save all mankind. But all who build their hopes of future happiness upon these foundations, will find that they are refuges of lies, which death will finally destroy. Our Saviour has described self-deceivers, and solemnly warned them of the fatal disappointment to which they are exposed. "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." This is a figurative representation of the character and fate of self-deceivers; but there is a literal one far more striking and impressive. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." Such will be the awful disappointment of all those who die without repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. If the righteous have hope in their death, then their hope

may be the strongest and brightest in that solemn season. We know that the hopes of the ancient saints were unusually enlivened as they approached nearer and nearer to the eternal world. You recollect how Jacob, and Joseph, and David, and Simeon, and Stephen, and Paul, appeared and conversed, in some of their last moments. They seemed to have an uncommon discovery of invisible and eternal realities, which removed the darkness of the grave and the terrors of death. And it is easy to believe that if death does not destroy, it must naturally tend to enlarge the views and enliven the hopes of the righteous. It certainly brings God, and Christ, and heaven, and all the glorious objects of eternity, into view, which are suited to gratify their hearts, and raise their hopes and joys to the highest degree. How often have we seen pious christians appear more holy, more heavenly, more joyful, on their dying beds, than they ever did before! There is nothing mysterious, nor incredible, in the numerous accounts we have read of the joyful and triumphant deaths of eminent saints. It was only necessary that God should remove from their view all the vain scenes and concerns of this world, and fix their whole hearts and attention upon heavenly and divine objects, and their holy souls must have been filled with joy and their mouths with praise. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

4. If it be peculiar to the righteous to die in a sure and joyful hope, then their death may be peculiarly instructive and beneficial to the living. The righteous and the wicked die under the same external circumstances, but their internal views and feelings are extremely different. The wicked are driven away in their sins, and leave the world with reluctance and remorse; but the righteous have light and joy and hope in their last moments. In the death of the wicked we see the dreadful consequences of the want of religion; but in the death of the righteous we see the reality and importance of religion. The death of the wicked excites our pity and compassion towards them; but the death of the righteous awakens a serious concern about ourselves. The death of the righteous, therefore, naturally tends to make better impressions on the minds of men, than the death of the wicked. Saints, in the view of the peaceful death of the righteous, rejoice with them, and feel comforted, strengthened, and animated to run the christian race with patience, and to prepare for their own dissolution. And the joyful death of the righteous may be still more instructive and beneficial to sinners. When they see or reflect upon the joyful and triumphant death of the godly, they are constrained to reproach and condemn themselves for not fixing their affections and hopes upon the same

solid foundation. They realize themselves to be guilty, mean, and contemptible creatures, in comparison with the godly, and deeply regret that they have lived so stupidly, so negligently, and so unwisely, as to be unprepared for that solemn and awful change which they must unavoidably experience. It gives them much keener convictions to hear the dying christian declare his joyful hopes and prospects, than to hear the dying infidel utter his last words of remorse and despair. There is nothing which both good and bad men are more inquisitive to know about the dead, than how they died. And to gratify this proper inquiry, volumes and volumes have been written, to exhibit the last scenes, the last words, and the last hopes, of dying christians. The Bible abounds with instances of the peaceful and joyful end of the righteous; while Judas stands a solitary and solemn monument of a sinner dying in despair. No instruction, no admonition, no reproof, can be more tender and impressive, than that which flows from the lips of him who dies in hope. How pertinent and affecting were the last words of that great and good man, who said to his young friend, "See in what peace a christian can die!" The living are under peculiar obligations to pay a sacred regard to the peaceful and joyful death of the righteous. Their last and most noble act upon the stage of life deserves and invites universal attention. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

You will now, my hearers, see the propriety of applying this discourse to the melancholy occasion for which it was requested.

The late sudden and unexpected death of Mr. Oliver Shepherd has sensibly affected the minds, not only of his relatives and friends, but of all the people in this town. You have been acquainted with him from his earliest days. You have seen his amiable disposition, his pleasing manners, his social qualities, his sprightly talents, his peculiar activity in business, and his rising reputation and usefulness. But though you have known how he lived, yet many, perhaps, have still to learn how he died. Notwithstanding he died at a great distance from his family, and from most of his friends and acquaintance, I have received such verbal and written information concerning his decease, that I am able to give some imperfect account of the closing scenes of his life.

He set out on his journey to Philadelphia in usual health, and with promising worldly prospects, though it seems that his mind was not wholly at ease. For some time before he left home, he had felt an unusual anxiety and solicitude about his spiritual concerns. These religious impressions rather increased, than abated, from day to day; but he pursued his

intended course, and safely reached Philadelphia. There he was taken sick, far from home, and in the midst of strangers. Though he felt no peculiar anxiety about the danger of his disorder, nor about the uncertainty of his ever returning to his native place, yet his convictions grew deeper and deeper. A sense of danger, but more especially a sense of guilt, became almost insupportable, until God was pleased to remove the burden from his mind, and give him joy and peace in believing. On a Sunday evening, at an early period of his sickness, a christian friend and acquaintance* called to see him, and spent about two hours with him. The account which he gives of that interview is, in substance, as follows: "He appeared overjoyed to see me, as he said he had something of importance to communicate, to relieve his mind. He was quite composed, and appeared lost to all pain and to every worldly concern, except when our conversation led us into it. He seemed very anxious to relate the manner in which it had pleased the Almighty to raise him from the pit of destruction; but was sensible that it was out of his power, by reason of the disturbance which he had received from his disease. He said, that previously to his leaving home, he had at times been under convictions; that these impressions became more and more lively during his journey, particularly at New York; and that since he had been confined, they had been increased by a clearer view of his horrid, wicked heart. He said that he continued under this load of sin, (which appeared to him heavier than the whole world with all its contents,) for about two days, when God saw fit to show him mercy through the precious blood of Christ. Here he stopped and paused — as if lost in wonder that Jehovah should condescend to bestow mercy on such a guilty rebel! Being asked whether he had any doubts as to his standing with God, he answered, that, setting aside the remaining selfishness of his heart, (which at times returned,) he had no doubts. His inclination for prayer was incessant, when free from pain. He felt so well that he was quite encouraged, and seemed to cherish the idea of contributing, as far as words and prayer could go, to the conversion and salvation of some of his young friends, whom he mentioned by name. He wished me to write to them, stating the glad tidings respecting his new and happy turn of mind; for he thought it was a pity for them to mourn when they ought to rejoice." This same friend paid him another visit, found him in a calm and serene state, and says, "I am happy to have it in my power to say, that I believe him to be a new man."

* Mr. Parsons.

Soon after this, his own minister,* being at New York, and hearing of his sickness, hastened to see him, and staid with him as long as he lived. He was then reduced very low, but frequently attempted to relate the new views and feelings which he had lately experienced, though he was never able to go through with the relation. His mind seemed to be absorbed in the constant contemplation of the great and glorious objects of eternity. At one time he observed of his own accord, "I have enjoyed comfort to-day." When he was told that his case appeared desperate; after a short pause, he replied, "It does not strike me very disagreeably." Being asked whether he had any unsettled secular business which he wished to have taken care of, he answered, "No." And immediately added, "If my accounts stood as well with God, as with men, I should be happy." He said some other things also respecting his temporal concerns, which discovered the sound state of his mind until a very little while before he expired. It is impossible to know the hearts of men in this world; but if we duly consider what has been said concerning the decease of Mr. Shepherd, we must be inclined to believe that he had hope in his death, and has fallen asleep in Jesus.

How happy would it have been for his disconsolate widow, his fatherless child, his aged parents, his brothers, his sisters, his friends and acquaintance, had he been permitted to recover his health, and to return to them a new man, having all his natural excellences adorned with the beauties of holiness! But this was a favor which infinite wisdom and goodness saw fit to deny them. Alas! he is gone to his long home, from whence he will never return. They shall see his face and hear his voice no more in the land of the living! But if they believe that he became a new man, that he died the death of the righteous, and that it is far better for him to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, this ought to mitigate their sorrows, and melt their hearts into unreserved and grateful submission. Though God knew the loss they would sustain, and the pains they would feel, under such a sudden, unexpected and heavy bereavement, yet he did not afflict and grieve them willingly, but wisely and benevolently designed to teach them that in adversity which they could not learn in prosperity. And what better method could he have taken to teach them that they never know, when they go out of their houses, that they shall ever enter into them again; when they leave their friends, that they shall ever see them again; when they undertake any business of importance, that they shall ever be able to accomplish it; when they sincerely desire to promote the spiritual

* Rev. Elisha Fisk

and eternal good of others, that they shall ever have an opportunity of fulfilling their pious desires and resolutions? Or how could he have admonished them in a more sensible and affecting manner, that neither health nor strength, neither promising prospects nor the dearest connections, neither their own precautions nor the best efforts of their fellow mortals, can prevent their dying when and where he has appointed? If they are wise, they will receive these salutary instructions with a grateful and submissive spirit, and look to God to teach them to profit. May the sorrowful widow betake herself with her dear little infant to the father of the fatherless, and the widow's God. This is the only way in which she can hope to find divine support and consolation, and derive everlasting benefit from bearing the yoke in her youth. May the bereaved parents cast their cares and burdens upon his almighty arm, who has carried them even to old age, and loaded them with his benefits all their days, and who will never leave nor forsake them while they sincerely rely upon his great and precious promises. Let the surviving brothers and sisters realize the discriminating mercy of God towards them, hear his solemn admonition to be ready also, and prepare to die in peace, and sleep in Jesus. Let all the young people in this place lay this death to heart, and especially those who were the most intimate with the deceased, and held him in the highest respect and esteem. He had resolved, if his life had been spared, to do all that words and prayer could do, to promote the spiritual good of his most valued friends. Though dead, he yet speaketh, and calls upon them to live the life, that they may die the death of the righteous. May divine consolation be given to the afflicted pastor of this people, who attended and comforted his sick and dying friend, and followed him to the house appointed for all living. May he never forget what he saw, and heard, and felt while performing the last duties, and paying the last tribute of respect, to one whom he had peculiar reasons to love and esteem. Is not the death of Mr. Shepherd full of instruction to all this people? Did he die the death of the righteous? Who would not wish that their last end may be like his? Death will come, and it may come suddenly. It cannot be too soon to prepare for it. It may be too late. Behold now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. If ye will hear the voice of God in his providence, harden not your hearts.

# SERMON XII.

## HAPPINESS OF SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

FUNERAL OF MRS. REBECCA M. FARRINGTON, WIFE OF REV. DANIEL FARRINGTON, OF WRENTHAM, IN HER 40TH YEAR: MARCH 20, 1816.

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness. — Psalm xvii. 15.

God gives men their choice in the present state, whether they will have their portion in this life or in the life to come. The men of the world are universally disposed to choose their portion in this life, and God generally gratifies their hearts, by giving them a large share of earthly enjoyments. But all good men choose to have their portion in another and better world than this. David was a good man; he loved God supremely, and preferred the future and everlasting enjoyment of him, to all the momentary and unsatisfying enjoyments of the present life. He looked beyond the grave for his full and unfailing portion. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." He expected, that as soon as he should be absent from the body, he should be present with the Lord; where he should see him face to face, and be completely blessed in his favor and presence for ever. And if his expectation was just, we may safely conclude,

That saints will be perfectly happy in the presence of God in heaven.

To illustrate this consoling truth, I shall attempt to show that there is such a place as heaven; that God manifests his peculiar presence there; and that saints will there be completely happy in his presence.

I. I am to show that there is such a place as heaven.

Some seem to imagine that heaven is a state rather than a place; but it is not easy to conceive of this distinction. The idea of locality attends all our ideas of created objects, whether spiritual or corporeal. If we think of any created spirit but our own, we conceive of it as at a distance from us, and existing in some place peculiar to itself. The idea of place certainly accompanies our idea of angels. We conceive them to be in heaven, or some other place, where God is pleased to employ them. And with respect to heaven, no person, perhaps, ever did really conceive of it under any other idea than that of place. The scripture often speaks of coming down from heaven, and going up to heaven; and these expressions, in many cases, will not admit of a figurative meaning. We know that Elijah and Christ were both seen to ascend from earth towards heaven, and to continue ascending higher and higher, until they rose above the utmost stretch of human sight. And of Christ it was expressly said by the angels, that he should so come in like manner as he was seen to go into heaven. Besides, the scripture not only represents heaven as a place, but describes it as the most magnificent place in the universe; and such we should naturally suppose would be the palace of the supreme Lord of all. The scripture also assures us, that the bodies of Elijah and Christ, and those who came out of their graves at his resurrection, are now actually in heaven. But bodies can exist only in place; and since we know that there are bodies in heaven, we are constrained to view it as a place rather than a state. Whatever changes may have passed upon glorified bodies, they must still be material, and have a local existence. Agreeably to this, our Lord told his disciples, when about to leave them and go to heaven, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." This plain and positive promise of Christ ought to convince us that heaven is a place.

II. I now proceed to show that God manifests his peculiar presence in heaven. David confidently expected to behold the face of God in some peculiar manner, when he should awake in the world of light. Although God does, in some incomprehensible manner, fill heaven, earth and hell, by his essential presence, yet it may be true that he makes some peculiar manifestations of his local presence in the kingdom of glory. We know that he has appeared to be, in a peculiar manner, present at certain times, in certain places. He was visibly

present when he led his people out of Egypt into the wilderness, by a pillar of cloud and fire. He was visibly present in the tabernacle and in the temple. He made the holy of holies his constant residence. In some such peculiar manner, we may suppose he manifests his presence in heaven. Nor is this a groundless conjecture; for the scripture represents him, as making heaven his high and holy habitation. Those holy men who were indulged the favor of looking within the vail, have told us that they saw his throne, where he makes visible and glorious manifestations of his presence. Isaiah says, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." The apostle John also gives a similar representation of the throne of God, and of those who surround it. If these representations are somewhat figurative, yet the figures must have some foundation in fact. But they would be groundless and absurd, if there were no visible manifestations of God's peculiar presence in heaven. In some part of that glorious place, we may suppose God has fixed his throne, his shechinah, or visible symbol of his presence, which all the inhabitants of heaven view as the residence of the supreme Sovereign of the universe; and near this holy habitation of the Deity, we may likewise suppose, the man Christ Jesus, and the highest orders of celestial beings, fill their appropriate places. Indeed, the whole current of scripture leads us to believe, that God dwells more visibly and gloriously in heaven, than in any part of the universe; and that both saints and angels behold his face in righteousness, and enjoy his blissful presence. This leads me to show,

III. That when the saints shall arrive in heaven, they will be completely satisfied and happy there.

They will enjoy all that felicity which David anticipated, when he humbly and confidently said to God, "I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." If there will be perfect happiness any where in the universe, it is to be expected in heaven, where God is, and Christ is, and where all holy beings are collected, and united in their views and affections. Heaven was designed for happiness, and great preparations have been made, and are still making, to raise the blessedness of holy creatures to the highest degree of perfection. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." And

Christ tells us that he will say to them on his right hand at the last day, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Since God intends to prepare heaven for the enjoyment and blessedness of his friends, we may be assured that it will be fitted in the best manner to answer that benevolent and gracious purpose. The place itself, and all the objects contained in it, will be completely suited to afford the most perfect satisfaction and enjoyment to all who shall possess it. There will be no disagreeable objects in heaven. There will be nothing offensive to the eye, or to the ear, or to the heart. There will be no painful heat, nor painful cold, nor painful darkness, nor painful hunger, nor painful thirst, nor painful fear. Nor will God merely exclude every thing unamiable and undesirable from heaven, but adorn it with every natural and moral beauty. Such is the place, which God has been and is still preparing for them that love him.

Let us now more distinctly consider the various species of happiness which they shall there enjoy, and which shall yield them complete satisfaction.

1. They will enjoy all the happiness which can flow from the free and full exercise of all their intellectual powers and faculties. All rational beings have a thirst for knowledge, and the discovery of truth affords real entertainment and satisfaction to their minds. Many good men in this world have delightfully employed their mental powers in their inquisitive researches into the works and ways of God. There is a peculiar pleasure in tracing and examining the natures, causes, relations and connections of things in the natural and moral world. In heaven the understanding will be cleared of its darkness, weakness, and liability to err, while all the natural faculties of the mind will be strengthened and enlarged. The memory will contain, and be able to recollect, all ideas which had ever been treasured up in it. All objects and truths which had been once known, will be forever known. And this will afford a great facility in making rapid and perpetual advances in knowledge. Besides, heaven will furnish the blessed with the best means of intellectual improvement. They will enjoy ample opportunities, in the course of ages, to become acquainted with all created objects, with all past events, and all the causes by which they were brought about. For Christ has promised his friends that the things which they know not now, they shall know hereafter. If the godly are greatly gratified with the little knowledge they gain of what passes in this world while they remain in it, how much greater satisfaction will it

give them to become acquainted with all that God has done, and will do, from the beginning to the end of time.

2. Those who shall behold the face of God in righteousness, will enjoy the pleasures of the heart, as well as those of the understanding. They will view objects and truths without that coldness and indifference, with which they viewed them in this dark and imperfect state. Their new, clear and increasing discoveries of the power, the wisdom, the goodness, the justice, the mercy, and the sovereignty of God, will fill their hearts with raptures of delight. The pleasures of the heart are the highest and most refined pleasures of the soul. When love, joy, gratitude and admiration fill the mind, they completely satisfy it, because they gratify all its powers and capacities at once, and leave no painful void. Those pleasures of the heart will naturally and constantly flow from the beatific vision of God in the kingdom of glory.

3. The saints in that blessed world shall enjoy the pleasures of the heart in the richest variety. As they will behold the face of God in righteousness, so they will be peculiarly gratified by the holy and delightful services in which they will be frequently employed. They will raise their admiring eyes to the throne of divine glory, and unitedly celebrate the praises of their Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. In these acts of pure devotion, their hearts will be full of the most lively, ardent and grateful affections. The pen of inspiration has painted, in glowing colors, the pure and elevated worship of the heavenly hosts. They are represented as casting their crowns at the feet of God and the Lamb, and paying them divine homage with the sincerest and warmest emotions of heart. The apostle John says, "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God, for ever and ever. Amen." This is one description of the worship of the heavenly inhabitants, and there are others equally beautiful and glorious. It is not possible to describe, nor even to conceive, with what holy fervor and delight the redeemed from among men will adore and praise Him, who washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God.

Again, they will enjoy the pleasures of society, as well as of devotion. As rational and benevolent creatures, they will be formed for the enjoyment of social intercourse. Society is the balm of life in this world. Should any one here be entirely secluded from all human society, he would be in a very disagreeable and wretched condition. But in heaven the pleasures of society will be universally and most perfectly enjoyed. When Peter, James and John, heard Christ, Moses and Elias, freely converse on the mount of transfiguration about the glorious work of redemption, they were thrown into an ecstasy of joy. But how much more pleasing and permanent satisfaction will the redeemed derive from the holy conversation of all the heavenly inhabitants! Adam, the father of mankind, will be there, who will have much to say concerning the creation of the world, the happiness of Eden, the astonishing effects of his apostacy, and the still more astonishing displays of divine grace towards him and his ruined family. Noah will be there, who will have much to say concerning the degeneracy of mankind, the awful destruction brought upon them by the Deluge, and what he saw, and heard, and experienced, during that tremendous catastrophe. Abraham will be there, who will have much to say concerning the dark times in which he lived, and the dark scenes and fiery trials which he endured. Paul will be there, who will have much to say concerning his duties, his dangers and his triumphs, while pulling down the kingdom of darkness, and building up the kingdom of Christ. All the redeemed will have much to say concerning the discriminating grace of God, in calling them out of darkness into light, and in preparing them to behold the face of God in the beauty of holiness. Angels will be there, who saw the creation of the world, who were ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, and who saw their once holy and happy associates rebel against their Maker, forfeit their seats in heaven, and receive the due rewards of their deeds; and those pure spirits will have much to say concerning what they saw in heaven, in earth, and the regions of despair. Above all, Christ will be there, and converse as freely, and far more instructively, than he ever did in the days of his humanity. He will be able and disposed to relate what passed in the divine council, when the gracious design of redemption was devised, and all the steps that have been taken to carry it into execution. In a word, he will clearly unfold whatever was dark and mysterious in all the dispensations of providence and grace, from the beginning to the end of time. The free, mutual and unreserved intercourse in such a holy society, will fill the hearts of the heirs of glory with unspeakable satisfaction and delight.

In addition to the happiness of this general intercourse, they will enjoy the peculiar pleasures of a more particular and intimate friendship. Though there will be no enemies in heaven, yet there will undoubtedly be circles of intimate friends, whose hearts, like David's and Jonathan's, were united in tender affections before they arrived in the mansions of heaven. Pious rulers and pious subjects, pious ministers and pious hearers, pious friends and pious acquaintance, will meet and know one another amidst the general assembly and church of the first-born; and their former union and communion in the church below will lay a foundation for a far more intimate and endearing friendship in the church above. Paul expected that the brotherly love, which united his heart with the hearts of those whom he had been instrumental of bringing to the saving knowledge of the truth, would continue and increase, and become an inexhaustible source of the purest friendship. We may well suppose that those who were the most intimately connected in this world, will often meet together in more private circles, and delightfully communicate to each other the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, they experienced, while passing through the storms and tempests of this present probationary state. Christ was more intimate with Peter, James, and John, than with the rest of his disciples, and still more intimate with John, than with Peter and James. The love of Christ, which cements the hearts of christians in this life, will continue to cement their hearts in the life to come, and produce a refined and sweet enjoyment peculiar to themselves.

Still farther to enhance their blessedness, they will enjoy the ineffable pleasure flowing from the expressions of the peculiar love and approbation of God. When they behold his face in righteousness, he will lift upon them the light of his countenance, and speak peace to their ravished hearts. We know not, indeed, in what mode he will express his love to them; but he, who could converse with Moses here on earth, face to face, as a man converseth with his friend, can easily employ means to convey to their minds the clearest evidence of his paternal complacency and delight in them, which will fill their souls with joys unspeakable and full of glory.

But that which will carry celestial blessedness to the highest degree of perfection, is the pleasure of anticipation. This is the principal source of divine comfort in the present state; but it will afford a far more permanent satisfaction to the blessed in their future and eternal state. They will be able to look forward to interminable ages, and anticipate not only the continuance, but the increase of holiness and happiness, as long as duration shall last. As David anticipated the joyful pros-

pect of appearing before God, and beholding his face in righteousness, so all the redeemed will joyfully anticipate their perpetual felicity, and rising glory to all eternity. In the presence of God there will be fulness of joy, and at his right hand there will be pleasures for evermore.

It now remains to improve and apply the subject.

1. Since we have reason to believe that heaven is a real place, we have no reason to believe that those departed spirits who have arrived there have any personal knowledge of what passes in this world. Some suppose that deceased saints are still conversant with the living, and have a personal knowledge of what passes among men. This opinion they found upon the supposition that heaven is merely a state, and not a place distinct and distant from this world. But if what has been said be true, there is no ground for this supposition. The scripture certainly represents heaven and earth as very different and remote from each other; and plainly intimates, that the dead are as ignorant of the state of the living, as the living are of the state of the dead. Whatever it is that prevents living saints from looking into heaven, it must undoubtedly prevent departed saints from looking back into this world. Job had no idea that a departed parent would have any knowledge of the state and circumstances of his children whom he left behind. He says to God, "Thou destroyest the hope of man. Thou prevailest against him; and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. His sons come to honor, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them." Isaiah represents the church as saying to God, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." The notion that departed saints are acquainted with the concerns of this world, seems to have been an occasion, at least, of the popish practice of praying to and worshipping canonized saints. And though protestants have not run into the same superstition and idolatry, yet the opinion that departed spirits know what passes among the living, and happens to them in this life, tends to turn men aside from the path of duty, and fills their minds with groundless hopes and fears.

2. If heaven be such a place as has been described, then it is easy to conceive of one way, at least, in which God can reward saints according to their works, when they arrive there. He may do it by local situation. If he has fixed his throne in the midst of heaven, if he has seated his Son at his right hand, and if he has arranged all the heavenly inhabitants in proper order; then he may place some saints in mansions nearer to, and some in mansions farther from, the throne of his glory, and the per-

sonal presence of the divine Redeemer. To be near to God and to Christ, will be a peculiar mark of the divine favor. We cannot suppose that the immensely numerous inhabitants of heaven are a mixed multitude, promiscuously blended together, without any order or appointed residence. As there are many mansions in heaven, so we may naturally conclude that individual saints and angels will know their own appropriate mansions. When saints arrive in heaven, they are without doubt severally conducted to the mansions which Christ has gone before to prepare for them. And those who have acted a better part on the stage of life, and done more good in the world than others, may be rewarded according to their works, by having better seats assigned them; that is, by being placed nearer to the throne of God, and the personal presence of Christ. We know that it is a great privilege to be placed in one part of this world rather than another; and it may be a greater privilege to be placed in a conspicuous part of heaven. As the principalities and powers in heavenly places may be seated above the patriarchs, the prophets, and apostles; so these may be seated above common christians, who will be in the same manner locally distinguished and favored according to what they had done and suffered for the honor of Christ, before they were absent from the body and present with the Lord.

3. If departed saints will be put in possession of such a variety of intellectual and spiritual enjoyments as we have mentioned, then it is easy to conceive how some may be much happier than others, though all will be perfectly blessed. Some will go to heaven with larger capacities than others; some will go with larger measures of religious knowledge than others; and some will go with larger measures of righteousness or true holiness than others. All these things are qualifications for the enjoyments of heaven, and render those who possess the largest portions of them capable of enjoying the highest degrees of spiritual and divine felicity. The prophets and apostles, especially Paul and John, were far better prepared for the various enjoyments of heaven, than thousands of others who never possessed their intellectual powers, religious knowledge, and eminent attainments in holiness. As some, if I may so speak, will enter forward in heaven, so many of them will keep forward to all eternity. Their previous qualifications will enable them to make more rapid advances in intellectual and spiritual improvements and enjoyments. When they shall behold the face of God in righteousness, they will enjoy a nobler satisfaction in contemplating the glory of God, surveying the scenes and objects in heaven, and in giving and receiving mutual instruction. As one star differs from another star

in glory, so one saint will differ from another saint in respect to knowledge, holiness and happiness; while there will not be one discontented or dissatisfied person in heaven. Such a uniformity, and yet variety, in heavenly felicity, will be absolutely necessary in order to raise the holiness and blessedness of God, of Christ, of angels and of saints, to the highest possible degree of perfection.

4. If saints, as soon as they shine forth in the kingdom of their Father, shall be put into the possession of the rich variety of intellectual and spiritual enjoyments, then there is reason to believe that their death will occasion more joy in heaven than sorrow on earth. Since saints at death carry all their piety, virtue and usefulness out of this world, so their decease is justly to be lamented. When David died, when Moses and Samuel died, when Rachel and Dorcas died, and when other pious persons left the world, their departure out of it justly occasioned sorrow and mourning, not only to their nearest connections, but to all who knew their worth and importance in life. But since the pious dead carry all their virtues and excellences into heaven, where they behold the face of God in righteousness, and take possession of all the holiness and felicity which they are capable of enjoying, their entrance into the kingdom of glory must give joy to all the holy and benevolent beings there. They rejoiced when they were converted; and their joy must be increased, when they see them actually glorified. Benevolence in all intelligent beings disposes them to rejoice with those who rejoice. When saints have surmounted all their sorrows and sufferings, and safely arrived at the haven of eternal rest, they will certainly rejoice; and will not the benevolent spirits in heaven rejoice with them, especially their former christian friends, who had been waiting for their safe and happy arrival? If benevolence be the same in heaven as on earth, the heavenly hosts will rejoice at the deaths of the godly; and if they do rejoice, they certainly will rejoice more sensibly and sincerely than surviving friends will mourn.

5. Since departed saints will behold the face of God in righteousness, we may form some clear and just conception of their beautiful appearance in the world of glory. Every amiable and distinguishing trait in their character will not only continue, but be vastly improved. Adam will be Adam there; Moses will be Moses there; Solomon will be Solomon there; Peter will be Peter there; Paul will be Paul there; and John, the beloved disciple, will be the beloved disciple there. Departed saints will carry with them all that variety of natural and moral excellences which they possessed in this life, and by which they were here known and distinguished. But though none of their intellectual powers and faculties will be

essentially altered, yet they will all be brightened and adorned with the beauties of holiness. And this variety in the characters of the blessed will beautifully display the wisdom and sovereignty, as well as the grace of God, in forming the vessels of mercy, and fill the mouth of each individual with peculiar arguments and motives of gratitude and praise. Each one will have something to thank God for, which is peculiar to himself; and so each will be perfectly satisfied with both his character and condition for ever. Whatever pious survivers loved and admired in their departed christian friends, they may be assured they shall see, and love, and admire, in them, when they shall happily meet them in the state of perfection.

6. If departed saints do immediately pass into glory, and become perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God, then their bereaved friends have no occasion to mourn on their account, but only on their own. The departed do not mourn for themselves, that they have safely reached the kingdom of glory, and behold the face of God in righteousness; and if they do not mourn for themselves, why should their surviving friends mourn for them? And if they rejoice, why should not their bereaved friends rejoice with them? Certainly they should not mourn as those who have no hope; or, in other words, they should not mourn that those whom they loved and esteemed on earth are put into a state of endless and growing perfection. But they have indeed just cause to mourn on their own account, and to mourn according to the loss they have sustained.

In this view, the decease of Mrs. Farrington, in the midst of her days and usefulness, is greatly to be lamented. It is not, perhaps, too much to say, that she nearly resembled the virtuous women whose character and conduct are drawn by the pen of inspiration. She merited the confidence of her husband, the affection of her children, and respect of all her friends and acquaintance. She was agreeable to all with whom she conversed, and conducted herself with propriety in every situation in which she was placed. She was called to move in a conspicuous, rather than elevated, sphere of life, where she exhibited peculiar wisdom, prudence, patience, economy, and all the domestic virtues. She passed through many checkered and trying scenes, with that serenity, affability, cheerfulness and fortitude, which are very rarely discovered in similar circumstances. How much this propriety of conduct was owing to her pious education, and early opportunities for mental improvement, it is not easy to determine; but there is ground to believe it was partly owing to the special grace of God, which she experienced in an earlier or later period of life. Though

in the first stages of her decline, she cherished high hopes and ardent desires of a recovery, yet some time before her decease, she totally renounced all such hopes and desires, and said she was willing to die, and if her heart did not deceive her, she was prepared to leave the world. This is a source of consolation to her bereaved husband, and to her sorrowful children, under their great and irreparable loss. They have just reason to mourn, but not to complain. The Judge of all the earth has done right, and it becomes them to be still, and not open their mouths, because he has done it. Submission to God is the only balm that can heal the wounds he has given them. He counted their tears before he drew them from their eyes, and weighed their sorrows before he pierced their hearts with anguish and distress. He meant to cast the cares and burdens of this young, numerous and promising family upon the parent, who has publicly devoted them to God, whom he has so long served in the gospel of his Son, and to increase his obligations to lead them in the ways of wisdom, and to do every thing in his power, to render them useful and happy, through every period of their existence. He meant, also, to teach these motherless children to be dutiful to their afflicted father, and to be kind and tender-hearted to each other; and, especially, to teach the elder to instruct, and guide, and watch, over the younger. If they cordially receive and follow these solemn admonitions of providence, they will hereafter have reason to say that it has been good for them that they have felt the chastising rod, and obeyed him who appointed it. Let them, therefore, neither despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when they are rebuked of him; and then he will give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

But is it nothing to us, my hearers, to behold and see this instance of mortality, and its distressing effects upon this circle of mourners? Certainly we ought to mourn with them that mourn, and weep with them that weep, and alleviate their sorrows by our sympathetic tears. We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards, and have yet to pass through the vale of tears to our long home. It deeply concerns us to improve this call of providence to prepare for the trials and close of life. We know not how soon it will be our lot to go before, or follow our friends to the grave, the house appointed for all living. Let us cordially embrace the gospel, sincerely devote the residue of our lives to God, and set our souls and houses in order, that we may meet the king of terrors without dismay, and have a happy transition out of this, into the world of light, where we may behold the face of God in righteousness, and be completely and forever satisfied with his likeness. Amen.

# SERMON XIII.

## CHRISTIAN PILGRIMS.

DECEMBER 19, 1819.

THESE all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. — HEB. xi. 13.

"THESE all died in faith." But who were these? If we look into the preceding verses, we shall find that they were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their pious posterity, whose faith in the promises of God transformed them into strangers and pilgrims on the earth, until the day of their death. And since a similar cause will produce a similar effect, we may justly conclude,

That the faith of christians in the promises of God, leads them to live and act as pilgrims and strangers on the earth. I shall show,

I. That christians do exercise a true faith in the promises of God. And,

II. That it leads them to live and act as pilgrims and strangers on the earth.

I. I am to show, that christians do exercise a true faith in the promises of God.

All real christians possess the same spirit which the patriarchs and prophets possessed, and which disposes them to exercise the same faith in the promises of God. Though God made many promises to the patriarchs and prophets, yet all his promises were comprised in one great promise of eternal life beyond the grave, through the death and mediation of the promised Messiah. It was to this promise they looked, and in this promise they trusted with entire confidence. This same

promise is made to christians under the gospel, in which they exercise a true and living faith. So the apostle tells us in the sixth chapter of this epistle. Having mentioned the promise made to Abraham, he goes on to say, "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we (christians) might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus." The question now is, how do christians exercise a true faith in the promises of God? To which I answer, as they exercise faith in the same promises of God in which the patriarchs exercised faith, so they exercise it in the same manner. And this leads me to observe,

1. That the faith of christians in the promises of God implies that they understand them. The apostle says, the patriarchs saw the promises afar off; which signifies that they understood their meaning, or what was promised. Seeing and understanding, signify the same thing. Seeing a truth and understanding it, signify the same thing. Seeing and understanding a design, signify the same thing. And seeing and understanding, a promise, signify the same thing. The patriarchs saw, that is, understood the promises of God made to them, and knew the nature of the spiritual and eternal blessings which they contained and secured. So the faith of christians in the promises of God, implies that they see them afar off, and understand the nature of that spiritual and eternal life which consists in the love, the service and enjoyment of God beyond the grave.

2. Their faith in the promises of God implies that they have a full and undoubting conviction of their truth and certainty. This was the case of the pious patriarchs. Having seen, that is, understood the promises afar off, they "were persuaded of them." They knew that God had pledged his veracity to fulfil his promises, and confirmed it by the solemnity and immutability of an oath. And christians having understood the promises of God, have a firm and unshaken conviction of their final accomplishment. They have set to their seal that God is true, and able and faithful to fulfil what he has promised. All real faith is always weaker or stronger, according to the evidence upon which it is founded. The faith of christians in the promises of God is as strong and unwavering as the immutability of God upon which it is founded. They have not the least doubt, whether the divine promises will be fulfilled to those to

whom they are made, though they may doubt whether they will be fulfilled to them, unless they cordially embrace them. And this leads me to observe,

3. That the faith of true christians in the promises of God implies a cordial approbation of them. The ancient patriarchs not only understood the nature, and were persuaded of the truth and certainty, of the divine promises, but embraced them; which implied a cordial approbation of them. Unbelievers may understand the nature, and be persuaded of the truth, of the divine promises, while they hate and oppose them, and have no heart to embrace them. But the faith of real christians in the promises of God implies a cordial approbation of the spiritual and everlasting good which they contain and secure. They esteem them great and precious promises, because they contain great and precious good. The divine promises led the patriarchs to "look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." And the same promises lead christians, who embrace them, to look for the same celestial city, where God will display the riches of his grace, and make them completely holy and blessed for ever. This is the spiritual future and eternal good, which the promises of God secure to christians who understand, believe and embrace them.

I now proceed to show,

II. That such a firm and cordial belief in the great and precious promises of God leads christians to live and act as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. The apostle tells us that the faith of the ancient patriarchs, who lived in the early and dark ages of the world, had such a powerful and transforming influence upon their hearts and lives. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." It is natural to suppose, therefore, that the faith of christians in the great and precious promises of the gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light, should more sensibly and forcibly lead them to feel and act as pilgrims and strangers, while passing through the shifting, trying and dangerous scenes of this present evil world. There is such an obvious and striking resemblance between a pilgrim and a saint, that saints in all ages seem to have agreed in representing their momentary and fatiguing lives under the easy and familiar similitude of a pilgrimage. When Pharaoh asked the patriarch Jacob how old he was, he replied, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in

the days of their pilgrimage." David, under the pressure of adversity and bodily infirmities, felt and spake like a pilgrim before God. "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." And the apostle Peter exhorts christians to feel and act as strangers and pilgrims, and to pass the time of their sojourning here in fear. A pilgrim is a traveller; a traveller is a sojourner; and a sojourner is a stranger. But since a pilgrim properly signifies a traveller on a religious account, I shall illustrate the point before us, by tracing the resemblance of christians who live under the influence of a realizing faith in the promises of God, and pilgrims, in a variety of particulars.

1. Pilgrims never feel at home. They find no place which they can call their own; where they can reside as long as they please. They are constrained to go from stage to stage, and to change their situation from day to day. And though they may sometimes find pleasant and desirable places, yet they can find no place in which they can feel at home.

In this respect, those who live in the faith of the promises of God feel like pilgrims. They have had their worldly prospects cut off. Their inward thought once was, that their houses should continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations. But when God opened their eyes to look into eternity, they were fully convinced that eternity was their proper home, and that they were swiftly travelling to it; and though at first they dreaded the idea of going into eternity, yet as soon as they became reconciled to God, and confided in his promises, they were pleased with the hope of leaving the world and going to their long home. As soon as men become christians, therefore, they immediately view time, and all the objects of time, in a very different light from what they did before. They no longer consider this world as their home, and no longer desire it to be so. They would not live alway. They realize the shortness and uncertainty of life, and feel that they are constantly travelling to the grave. Like Paul, they die daily; and like him, they are in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better than travelling the rugged road of life. This is their habitual feeling; and though the objects of time may often interrupt their views of eternity, yet their own frailty, or the mortality of others, or some heavy calamity, will soon give them a realizing sense that they are going the way of all the earth.

2. Pilgrims feel very much alone in the world. They find but a few travelling their way; and if some now and then fall

into their company, yet they are strangers to their views and feelings, and afford them but very little comfort or entertainment, and generally they obstruct rather than animate and quicken them in their journey. So that notwithstanding they see and converse with a multitude of mankind, yet they feel very much alone through the whole course of their pilgrimage.

This is the case of christians who live by faith in the promises of God. Though they remain among their former friends and acquaintance, and are as willing to converse with them as ever they were, yet they find a coldness, indifference and alienation in those who once were fond of their company and familiar intercourse. Having set their faces towards heaven, those who are going in a contrary direction wish to avoid them as much as possible, so that they find their Saviour's observation verified, that the tender ties of nature are dissolved, and the father and the son, and the daughter and mother are at variance, and a man's foes are they of his own household. This throws christians into a state of solitude. They are alone in the midst of company. The primitive followers of Christ were deserted of the world, and left to walk alone in the strait and narrow way to the kingdom of heaven. And this is the case of those who come out from the world and determine to walk with God. They find themselves, like pilgrims, walking alone in this busy and stupid world.

3. Pilgrims always feel themselves exposed to danger. Travelling in a foreign country, they are unacquainted with the disposition of the inhabitants, and unused to their customs and manners. On these accounts, they never know when or where they are safe. They cannot place entire confidence in those with whom they converse, whether they wear a friendly or unfriendly aspect. They feel exposed to every kind of injury, and can depend upon nothing but their own vigilance, caution, and prudence, to protect them. They are exposed to contempt from the great, to fraud from the unjust, and to every evil from the lawless and malevolent. The poor Jew who fell among robbers was a pilgrim. And all pilgrims are always exposed to danger.

In this point, likewise, christians in the present evil world resemble pilgrims. If they were of the world, the world would love their own; but because they are chosen out of the world, therefore the world hate them. This was the declaration of Christ, who knew what is in man. And agreeably to this declaration, he warned all his followers to beware of men. The ancient patriarchs met with innumerable dangers, while passing through their weary pilgrimage. Jacob was defrauded by Laban, and assaulted by Esau. Joseph was inhumanly

treated and sold into Egypt, by his brethren. Moses was obliged to flee his country, and become a pilgrim and stranger in a strange land. The seed of Jacob were oppressed and cruelly treated, by Pharaoh. David was dreadfully harassed by Saul, and driven from his kingdom by his undutiful son. And some of the saints, the apostle tells us in the context, "were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented." And the primitive christians met with no better treatment from the world, while passing through their painful pilgrimage. The nature of this world is not changed. It still lies in wickedness, and remains a dangerous enemy to those who are passing through it, in their way to heaven. Christians find they have occasion to fear both the objects and men of the world. They feel that they are in an enemy's land, and need to go trembling, watching, and praying, until they arrive where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

4. Pilgrims feel thankful for all the agreeable accommodations which they meet with on their way. They are sensible of their dependence on providence, and on the favor and assistance of their fellow men. They are thankful for plain and smooth paths, for pleasant weather, and for good stages for rest and refreshment. And they are thankful to every stranger who faithfully directs them and kindly treats them. Every favorable circumstance appears better than they feared, or expected, and therefore makes a grateful impression on their minds.

And thus it is with christians, who live by faith in the divine promises. They have an habitual sense of their constant dependence upon God and their fellow creatures. They do not expect much good from the world; and every favor they receive either from the hand of God, or man, surpasses their expectation, and fills them with gratitude. Abraham was thankful for the kindness of the children of Heth, in the day of his sore bereavement; Jacob was thankful for his hard pillow at Bethel; Ruth was thankful for the favor of gleaning in the field of Boaz; and all christians are given to gratitude. They are thankful for the Bible, for the Sabbath, and for all the means of grace. They are thankful for agreeable connections and faithful friends. They are thankful for life, for health, and for all outward prosperity. They are thankful for opportunities of doing as well as of getting good; and they are thankful for preventing goodness, by which they are exempted from the numberless evils and calamities which they see daily falling upon their fellow men around them. They are ready to say with grateful emotions, "It is of the Lord's mercies, that we are not consumed."

5. Pilgrims take nothing with them but what they deem necessary for their journey. They throw aside all superfluities as incumbrances. They carry no more clothes and property than they expect to use. They justly conclude, that every thing which is not useful, will be detrimental. They travel from a sense of duty, and not for the sake of pleasure or amusement. They do not wish to attract the observation or admiration of strangers, but only to pass among them with ease and safety. And upon this principle, they carry nothing with them but necessaries, and if any thing else be offered to them, they will gratefully refuse it. For they mean to fit themselves for travelling, and for nothing else.

In this particular, all christians whose treasures and hopes are in heaven, resemble pilgrims. They have been crucified to the world, and the world to them, by the cross of Christ. They have chosen to have their portion, not in this, but in a future life. To purchase the pearl of great price, they have sold all that they have in this world. Their love to heavenly things has detached their supreme affections from earthly objects. These appear to be vanities of vanities to all who take God for their portion. But since food and raiment and many other things are necessary for their support and usefulness in life, they desire them for use in their way to heaven. The prayer of Agur expresses their feelings on this subject. "Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me." They feel that more than this would be inconvenient. Hence they labor not to be rich, and seek not great things for themselves. As pilgrims, who pass by houses, and fields, and flocks, which they do not need, feel perfectly contented without them, so christians behold the abundance of the rich with an indifferent eye. They feel better without such possessions than with them. They realize that as they brought nothing into the world with them, so they can carry nothing out. They are sensible that life and all its enjoyments are of short and uncertain continuance, and that the fashion of this world is rapidly passing away, and they are as rapidly passing away with it. They consider all their temporary accommodations as the dervis did the palace of a prince. As the dervis was travelling, he came to the palace of a prince, and without ceremony went into one of its apartments and lodged. In the morning the prince asked him how he dared to make so free with his palace. He replied, he took it to be a caravansary; that is, a house for the convenience of pilgrims. The prince demanded how he came to think so. In reply, the dervis asked him, who lived there before him? He answered, his father. The dervis asked again, who lived there before his father?

The prince answered, his grand-father. Well, said the dervis, I think a house which changes its inhabitants so often, may properly be called a caravansary. Christians look not at the things that are seen, but at things which are not seen, and eternal. They live by faith in the promises of God, and feel as those believers did, who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and more enduring substance. They feel like good old Barzillai, who declined accepting the great and good things which his king offered him, lest they should hinder his preparation for death.

6. Pilgrims never think of turning back, on account of any difficulties which they meet with in their way. If they are lame, or sick, they stop only till they recover, and then go forward. If the season be unfavorable, they wait only till it becomes better. Or if the roads be obstructed, they wait only till the obstructions are removed. They never think of turning back on any account.

Just so those who live by faith, having put their hand to the plough, never look back. They have sat down and counted the cost, and determined to take up the cross, and follow Christ whithersoever he leads them. They mean to fight the good fight of faith, and follow them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Pilgrims long to get to their journey's end, which prepares them for rest and enjoyment. They anticipate the happiness of ceasing from their dangers and fatigues, and of enjoying peace, safety and quietness.

And this is the feeling of christians, who live by faith on the promises of God. Paul desired to depart this life, and to be with Christ, which was far better. In running the christian race, he kept his eye and his heart upon the prize. The primitive christians reckoned that the sufferings of the present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. Moses had respect to the recompense of reward, and all the patriarchs sought a heavenly country, and the everlasting enjoyments of a heavenly city. And all who live by faith, long for the end of their journey, and wish for that rest which remaineth to the people of God. And such a life of faith and hope prepares them in the best manner for a peaceful and joyful death. It was because the ancient patriarchs lived in faith, that they all died in faith. Those who live by faith in the promises of God, and feel and act as pilgrims and strangers on the earth, are properly prepared to leave this world, and to enter into that which is far better. A detachment from the world, and an attachment to heaven, always prepares men to

be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. Those who live in faith of the promises are prepared to take the possession of them. A lively faith in the promises of God, removes the sting of death, and the terrors of the grave. This was verified in the triumphant death of Paul. He could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If those who cordially embrace the promises of God are real pilgrims, then it is to be expected that they will profess their faith before men, and confess that they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth. Their faith in the promises of God, which leads them to feel as pilgrims, must naturally lead them to renounce the fear of man, and disregard the reproach of the world, and dispose them to confess that they are determined to live and act as pilgrims, and to walk in the strait and narrow path to eternal life, which God has promised them. The faith of the patriarchs in the promises of God, disposed them to declare to the world, that they had set their faces towards heaven. They all confessed that they were pilgrims, who were seeking a heavenly country, and a city which had solid foundations, whose builder and maker was God. Though they foresaw all the dangers and difficulties to which a public profession of their faith in the promises of God, and their strict obedience to his commands would expose them, yet they resolved to face a frowning world, and let them know that they placed their trust in the Lord Jehovah, in whom there is everlasting strength. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not ashamed to acknowledge the Lord to be their God; and God was not ashamed to be called their God: for he had prepared for them a city. The primitive christians, who embraced the promises of God, were not ashamed to confess Christ before men, and to declare that they meant to live by faith, and act as pilgrims, through the whole course of their lives. It must be owing, therefore, either to the want or the weakness of faith, in any who entertain the hope that they have embraced the promises of the gospel, that they are afraid or ashamed to profess Christ before men, and their determination to live and act as pilgrims. Can they really believe that they are the children of Abraham, if they have not the faith and confidence of Abraham? Can they really believe that they are christians, if they have not the

spirit of Christ, and are not willing to take up the cross, and follow him? Can they really believe that they are the followers of those who inherit the promises, if they are afraid or ashamed to profess their faith in the promises? It is certainly safe for those who embrace the promises of the gospel, to profess their faith in them, and to feel and act according to them. This is what God requires, the world expects, and they cannot neglect, consistently with the hope of eternal life.

2. If those who profess to be christians, at the same time profess to be pilgrims, then there is a great impropriety as well as criminality in professors of religion being conformed to the world. Their very profession implies, that they have renounced the spirit, the customs and manners of the world, and mean to live by faith, and walk in newness of life. They profess to be pilgrims; but pilgrims would appear very absurd, in dressing, in living, and acting, as those who are not on a journey. So the professors of religion appear very absurd, when they conform to the spirit, to the language, to the customs and amusements, of the world. How absurd would it have been, for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to have conformed to the heathen nations among whom they sojourned, in their idolatrous rites and ceremonies, and in their impious, corrupt, and criminal practices! How contrary would it have been to their profession of supreme love to the supreme God, to bow down to heathen idols in heathen temples, to sacrifice to heathen deities, and to attend heathen feasts and festivals! Under the Mosaic dispensation, the professed people of God were expressly forbidden to conform to the heathen about them in any of their religious concerns, and in any of their common, civil, and social concerns, and in any of their modes of living and dressing. Though the men of the world under the gospel are not heathens, yet they are as real and great enemies to God, to his cause, and to his friends, as any of the pagan world ever were, or are now; and it is as absurd and criminal for christian professors to conform to their spirit, and to symbolize with them in their unchristian practices, as it was for patriarchs and prophets to be conformed to the enemies of the God of Israel. The apostle Paul says to christians, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." And he represents the conformity of believers to unbelievers, as absurd as the former conformity of the professed people of God to their pagan neighbors. "For," says he, "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath

he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty." The reason why christians should not conform to the world, the apostle John gives. Speaking of sinners, he says, "They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them." Christians, who are religious pilgrims, and travelling towards heaven, cannot stop and converse with the men of the world, and delightfully hear them speak, out of the abundance of their worldly hearts, without contradicting their profession, and dishonoring their religion.

3. If all real christians are pilgrims, and live and act as such, then they are living monitors to sinners. They admonish both by their profession and practice. They profess to be going in the strait and narrow way to a heavenly country, and to avoid the broad road to everlasting darkness and despair. They are citizens of Zion, and set their faces Zion-ward. Their practice speaks louder than words, and admonishes all who do not walk with them, that they believe both the promises and threatenings of the gospel; and that if their faith is well founded, they shall be received into a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; while those who refuse to walk with them, will soon faint, and languish, and die. Such monitors were the ancient patriarchs. Such monitors were the primitive christians. And such monitors are pious parents, pious brothers and sisters, pious friends, and all pious persons, who are living and acting as pilgrims. They are the light of the world, and salt of the earth. They have been the preservers of the world that lies in wickedness, for nearly six thousand years. You will find this to be true, if you read the lives of the Old Testament and New Testament believers in the promises of God; or if you read the lives of later christians; or if you observe the spirit and conduct of the pious pilgrims still living among you. You have heard their repeated and solemn admonitions in health, in sickness, and on a dying bed. Sinners see and shun the strait and narrow path in which they are walking, and which practically tells them that they are pursuing the path to ruin. Pious pilgrims have always been the excellent of the earth, and are still living and solemn monitors to the unbelieving world. And the force of their admonitions will sooner or later be felt. Let them

not, therefore, cease to admonish, through fear or favor of those who need their admonitions.

4. If all real christians are pilgrims, then those have little reason to think they are pilgrims who do not make it appear so in the sight of the world. They generally know and love their own, and none but their own. They have in all ages distinguished, hated and opposed pious pilgrims. And they are as capable now, as ever they were, of distinguishing pilgrims. And if christian professors do not appear as pilgrims in their view, they must have but little reason for their appearing so in their own view. The world will claim them, and they can hardly deny their claim.

5. If christians are pilgrims, who are entitled to the great and precious promises of God, then they will be peculiarly happy when they finish their pilgrimage, and reach their long home. All their labors, and dangers, and trials, and sufferings, will work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Having come out of great tribulation, they will wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. They will cease from their labors, and their works will follow them. They will inherit the promises, and find mansions prepared for them in heaven. They will be as holy and happy as their hearts can desire, or their natures can admit.

In the course of the year just closing, four professed pilgrims have finished their pilgrimage in this place. We have good reason to hope that they now inherit the promises. One finished her course last week, and finished her course with joy. Her nearest friends have reason to rejoice, as well as mourn; and all who in the course of the year have been bereaved of exemplary christian friends, have reason to rejoice and submit. These deaths ought to admonish and console all the pious pilgrims in this place. They hope to leave the world in as much peace and safety as those who have gone before them. There have been sixteen deaths here in the current year — three infants; three children; three young persons; three in the meridian of life; one in the decline of life; and three aged persons. Whether men are pilgrims or not, they must leave this world, and go into another, from which they will never return.

Now let me ask all whether you are prepared to follow those that are gone? It has been a healthy year; the next may call for a larger number. Have you ever trusted in the promises? These alone can prepare you for a safe, easy, and joyful death.

# SERMON XIV.

## LIVING AND DYING UNTO THE LORD.

FEBRUARY 6, 1820.

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. — Rom. xiv. 8.

The church at Rome was composed of both Jews and Gentiles, who entertained different opinions about the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation. The Jews supposed they were still binding on christians, but the Gentiles supposed they were under no obligation to observe them. Though this was the truth which the apostle had taught them, yet he would not have them too severely condemn the Jewish converts, who might be conscientious in regarding those days, and rites, and ceremonies, which were once commanded, but now abrogated. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him." After fully stating this diversity of opinion respecting non-essential things, he proceeds to assert that they all agreed in one point; "For," says he, "none of us liveth to himself: and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

The plain and important truth which these words suggest for our serious consideration, is,

That real christians, who are the Lord's, are willing both to live and to die to him. I shall show,

I. That real christians are the Lord's. And,

II. That they are willing both to live and to die to him.

I. I am to show that real christians are the Lord's. God is the former of the bodies and father of the spirits of all men. He is their creator and proprietor, and claims a right to dispose of them all according to his sovereign pleasure. But all true christians are the Lord's in several peculiar and important respects.

1. They are the Lord's by election. He has chosen them, in distinction from the rest of mankind, to be the objects of his peculiar favor, and heirs of everlasting life. The apostle speaking to the christians of Ephesus says, "According as he hath chosen us in him" (that is, Christ,) "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Again he says to the Thessalonians, "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." God determined from eternity to save a part, and only a part of mankind. This certain, definite number he elected to eternal life, and appointed all the means necessary to bring them to future glory. This the apostle represents in a clear and strong light, in the eighth of Romans. "For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." All real christians have been elected, called, sanctified, and entitled to eternal life.

2. They are the Lord's by redemption as well as by election. Though God gave Christ to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and to taste death for every man, yet he designed to apply his atonement to those only whom he had appointed to salvation. In this sense, Christ laid down his life for the sheep, and died for the elect in particular. If God had not designed to save the elect from the wrath to come, and make them vessels of mercy, we have no reason to think that Christ would ever have died an expiatory sacrifice. It is in consequence of the divine purpose to bring home many sons unto glory, that the rest of mankind enjoy the means of grace and offers of mercy. So that real christians are emphatically those who are redeemed from among men, and actually bought with a price; and they are, on that account, the Lord's property.

This leads me to observe,

3. That they are the Lord's by sanctification. He has shed abroad his love in their hearts, and raised them from spiritual death to spiritual life. They are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before

ordained that they should walk in them. He has formed them after his own image, for his own glory. Hence David says, "The Lord hath set apart the godly for himself." Accordingly, the apostle tells them, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Those whom God sanctifies, he means to employ as active instruments of promoting his own glory, both in time and eternity, and in this respect they are his peculiar people. I may add,

4. They are the Lord's by adoption as well as by election, redemption and sanctification. He has received them into his holy family, and entitled them to all the privileges and blessings of it. "Behold," says the apostle John, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." And the apostle Paul says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." Every real christian is adopted into the number, and has a right to all the privileges of the children of God. Thus it appears that all true christians are, in several peculiar and important respects, the Lord's. I shall now proceed to make it appear,

II. That all of this character are willing both to live and to die to the Lord. There is no medium between men's living and dying to God, and their living and dying to themselves. But the apostle says, in the verse before the text, that christians do not live nor die to themselves. "None of us," that is, none of us christians, "liveth to himself; and no man dieth to himself." From this, he justly infers, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord." He supposes that all true christians are cured, in a measure, of their native selfishness, by possessing the contrary spirit of pure, disinterested benevolence. It is certainly true of all who have been the subjects of a saving change, that their hard and selfish heart has been taken away, and a soft, tender, benevolent heart has been given them. Their sanctification essentially consists in holy, benevolent affections, which are totally inconsistent with their former supreme attachment to themselves. Hence they can sincerely say, "The love of Christ constraineth

us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again." Again we read, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." A new heart will infallibly produce a new life. As soon as any are willing to be the Lord's, they are willing to live and die to him. But here it may be proper to enter into particulars, and observe,

I. That all who are the Lord's are willing to live to him. This will appear from various considerations.

1. All real christians dedicate themselves to God. They sincerely and heartily give up themselves to be the Lord's as long as they live and as long as they exist. They deliberately, and voluntarily, and solemnly resolve, that for themselves, let others do as they please, they will serve the Lord, and live to him, and not to themselves. Thus Joshua resolved, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." And thus the primitive christians gave their ownselves to the Lord as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which was their reasonable service. All who give their hearts to God, give themselves to him. Though they do not always, for some reason or other, give in their names to Christ, and make a public dedication of themselves to the Lord, yet they always inwardly and sincerely consecrate themselves to his service. While they feel their hearts united to God in supreme affection to his character and designs, they cannot refrain from choosing to be his friends and servants for ever.

2. They are willing to live under the government of God, and submit to his guidance, direction, and disposal. As they choose to be the Lord's, so they are willing that he should reign over them, and glorify himself by them. This we find has always been the dutiful and submissive spirit of the friends of God in all ages. Abraham lived a life of submission to the divine will, and in the most trying circumstances committed himself to the care and disposal of divine providence. His trials were singular, and his submission to the will of God was no less singular. He held nothing too dear to give up at the call of Providence. Job had no will of his own, but cheerfully and gratefully gave up whatever God called for at his hands. He could bless God under the frowns, as well as under the smiles of his providence. David rejoiced that his times were in the hands of God, and left it to him to carry him whithersoever he pleased, and to dispose of his life and kingdom as seemed good in his sight. Eli spake the same language, and exercised the same submission, under the se-

verest strokes of his hand. The Shunammite said all was well, while suffering under the heavy hand of God. As soon as Paul knew the grace of God in truth, he consulted not with flesh and blood, but with the voice of providence, and cordially submitted to it. And this submissive spirit reigned in the hearts of all the disciples of Christ, in his own day, and in the days of the apostles. Those who choose to be the Lord's, and dedicate themselves to his service, choose to be the subjects of his wise and holy government. The spirit of adoption is the spirit of submission; and those who possess it, choose to live to God, by referring themselves habitually and absolutely to his disposal.

3. They live to God by a cheerful and universal obedience to his commands. They esteem his precepts concerning all things to be right, and mean to obey his injunctions, however strict and self-denying. They wish to know what is that good, and perfect, and acceptable, will of God, that they may obey it. Like Paul, they "delight in the law of God, after the inward man." They sincerely resolve to be universally obedient, though they very frequently fail of fulfilling their resolutions. All the ancient people of God, whose amiable characters are recorded and delineated in the Bible, were habitually obedient to all the divine commands. Their lives were guided and governed by the authority of God, though they were far from perfection in obedience. And this is true of all real christians; they mean to obey God rather than man; and it is their sincere desire to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

4. They are willing not only to obey the commands of God, but also to promote the interests of his kingdom. They know that God is seeking this above all other objects; and having dedicated themselves to his service, they desire to be workers together with him, in promoting his own cause. They therefore do actually seek first his kingdom, and desire to employ every proper method to promote his glory in the salvation of sinners. This is properly the business of their lives, and not something merely occasional. It is their constant desire and prayer to God, that sinners may be saved, the kingdom of God enlarged, and all his gracious designs accomplished. And they are steadfast and persevering in their exertions to advance the interests of religion, and the glory of God in the salvation of the elect, whom he has given to Christ as the reward of his sufferings and death. Thus, whether they live, they live unto the Lord. Their lives are dedicated to and employed in his service.

And it is no less true,

II. That whether they die, they die unto the Lord. They are willing to be dying creatures. They would not wish to live alway. They carry about with them an habitual sense that they are under a sentence of mortality; that if they wait, the grave is their house, and that eternity is their long home. And they often contemplate these serious and important objects with a solemn and consoling hope. But yet they desire to die to the Lord, and not to themselves. For,

1. They desire that God should order the time when they shall die. This concerns his glory, which they wish might be promoted by their death, as well as by their life. Upon this subject, they are willing to acknowledge their entire ignorance. They may see reasons why they should wish to live to such or such a period, because they imagine they might do more good by living so long, than by leaving the world earlier in life. Or they may see reasons why they should wish that their days might be shortened. But after all, they are willing to leave the time of death to the divine disposal. Job said, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." And Paul said to the Philippians, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain: yet what I shall choose, I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." Those who have such views and feelings may be said to die daily to the Lord.

2. Christians are willing that God should order the place as well as the time of their dying. Though the place seems to be a point of less importance than the time of death, yet some christians, and perhaps all, consider it interesting to themselves. But whatever may be their own choice simply considered, as to the place of death, they are willing to refer this and every other circumstance of dying to the wise and holy disposal of God. He may have good ends to answer, by appointing one place rather than another. How many good men have gone to distant places, and even to distant countries, for the sake of recovering their health and preserving their lives; and yet have lost their lives where they hoped to preserve them. Such persons have often had ardent desires to return, and die in the presence of their friends; but as sincere christians, they were willing to die to the Lord, in the places he had appointed. This is the habitual feeling of real christians, when they anticipate this solemn subject. They know not where it is best that they should breathe their last, and lay their bodies in the dust; and therefore they commit this, as well as every thing else, into the hands of God, who has a right to determine the place of their departure out of this world, so as best to promote his own

glory. This is implied in their dying to the Lord. I may farther observe,

3. That real christians are willing that God should order not only the time and place, but all other circumstances of their death. These we find by observation are extremely various. Some die with one disease, and some with another. There are ten thousand fatal diseases, and by which of them the living shall die, they know not, or whether by any one of them. For there are ten thousand accidents, by which multitudes are called out of time into eternity. And no man knows beforehand, whether he may not fall by a sudden and unexpected stroke. But there are other more serious circumstances of dying. Christians may die in light or in darkness; in hope or in fear; in the lively and full exercise of all their rational powers, or in a total delirium. Now they may anticipate either of these numerous agreeable or disagreeable circumstances of leaving the world; and when they do this, in the exercise of grace, they are willing that God should glorify himself by the peculiar circumstances of their death. Though they have a choice, yet they desire the will of the Lord may be done by their death. Thus real christians both live and die to the Lord, and are his for ever.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. The first thing now suggested by this subject is, that none can be real christians who are not willing to be creatures. True christians realize that they are the Lord's, and are heartily willing to be so. This is not true of any unrenewed man. "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." This is the language of every sinner's heart. He is not willing that there should be a God, and of course is not willing to be a creature. For he knows that if there be a God there is a creator, and, if there be a creator, he is his creature; and if he is his creature, that he has a right to do what he will with his own. Here lies the essential difference between a sinner and a saint. A saint is willing to be a creature, and to feel and fulfil the obligations of a creature. He is willing to be the Lord's, and to give him his heart and his life: that is, both to live to him, and to die to him. He is willing that his Creator should employ him to answer all the purposes of his creation, both in life and in death, and for ever. But no sinner is willing to be a creature, and to feel and fulfil the obligations of a creature. He is not willing to be the Lord's, and to give him his heart and life; that is, both to live to him and to die to him. He is not willing that his Creator should employ him to answer all

the purposes of his creation, both in life and in death, and for ever. He is totally destitute of all true submission. He says in his heart, that he who hath made him shall not reign over him, and dispose of him for ever. He says he will not be the Lord's. "This is a spirit diametrically opposite to the spirit of the real christian, who says, whether he lives, he will live to the Lord, or whether he dies, he will die to the Lord, and be his for ever. He exercises entire, absolute, unconditional submission to his Creator. If this be true, every one may see that no person can be a real christian without being willing to be the Lord's, and exercising unreserved submission to him.

But it is said, the scripture knows nothing about such submission, and says nothing about such submission. Here then let us seriously and impartially inquire, whether the scripture does not know and say something about such entire submission? Does not the apostle very plainly say in the text, that he and other christians exercised precisely such submission as has been mentioned and described? Does he not say, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's?" Does not the apostle here mean to say something more about christians, than sinners can say about themselves? Sinners can say, whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's, though they cannot say, whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord, and are willing to be the Lord's. The apostle meant to distinguish christians from sinners; but if you leave out the idea of perfect submission, he says nothing in the text to mark any essential distinction between them. It is impossible to discover any important and consistent meaning in the text, unless it implies that christians are willing to be the creatures of God, and to be at the absolute disposal of their Creator, by which they essentially differ from sinners. This essential distinction runs through the Bible; and I might mention Abraham, Job, Moses, David, and many other eminent saints, who actually exercised the most unreserved submission to God. But I will let the apostle Paul set this subject at rest. He professedly and clearly illustrates it in the ninth of Romans. After stating the doctrine of divine sovereignty in the plainest and strongest terms, he represents a sinner as objecting against it. "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" The apostle replies to this objection according to the real meaning of the objector. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Here we see that every sinner is unwilling to be a

creature, and that this unwillingness forms the essential distinction between him and a real christian. But if this be true, then every one must see that none can be real christians without being willing to be creatures; which implies every thing that can be implied in the most entire, absolute, and unconditional submission to God.

2. If christians are willing to live and to die to the Lord, then the life of a real christian is a life of self-denial. It is a life which resembles the life of Christ, who lived and died to the Lord. He lived to his Father, and he died to his Father. He lived to his Father by perfect obedience to his commands, and perfect submission to his will. This he often declared. He said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Again he said, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." And again he said, "I do always those things that please him." This was perfectly living to God while he lived. And he died to God as well as lived to God. For the truth of this he appeals to his Father, just before he died. "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Accordingly when the hour was come that he should die, he expressed his perfect submission to his Father's will. "He said, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." This was living a life and dying a death of self-denial. Accordingly, the apostle would have the Corinthians view the self-denial of Christ with the highest admiration and gratitude. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Such perfect self-denial Christ exhibited both in his life and death. And he required every man, who would become his disciple, to live the same life of self-denial. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Now, all real christians follow the example and obey the command of Christ, in a greater or less degree. Just so far as they live to the Lord, and just so far as they are willing to die to the Lord, they live the same life of self-denial that Christ lived, and required his followers to live. They mean to please God, as Christ pleased him. They mean to deny themselves, as Christ denied himself. As he gave up every thing that God required him to give up, so they mean to give up every thing that God requires them to give up. As he submitted to every evil that God required him to submit to, so they mean to submit to every thing of a self-denying nature that God requires them by his word or providence to submit to. If they live, they mean to live for God, and not for

themselves. If they die, they mean to die for God, and not for themselves. Such constant and universal self-denial is essential to a christian life.

3. If christians are willing to live and to die to the Lord, then they live much happier than those who live to themselves. They are willing to be what God has made them to be. They are willing to do what God requires them to do. And they are willing to endure all the evils which God sends upon them. They are happy in prosperity and adversity, in health and sickness, in living and dying. They have great peace while living to God, and nothing can destroy it. They have that peace which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot destroy. But those who live to themselves have no solid and permanent peace. They are not pleased to be what God has made them to be. They are not pleased to do what God has required them to do. And they are not pleased to suffer what God lays upon them. They are unhappy in prosperity and adversity, in health and sickness, in the prospect of living and in the prospect of dying. The whole course of providence is continually operating against them, by exciting groundless hopes and groundless fears, groundless joys and groundless sorrows. They feel that anxiety about futurity, which imbitters all the good and evil they experience. They are all their life-time subject to bondage, through fear of not only losing the enjoyments of life, but life itself, and of suffering the pains, not only of the first, but of the second death. Now real christians, who are willing to live and to die unto the Lord, in a great measure escape these great internal evils, which universally disturb, and often destroy, the peace and happiness of those who live to themselves. They are internally happy amidst their external evils and burdens. This was certainly the case of the primitive christians. The apostle, speaking in their name, says, "As dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." While they were fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, they rejoiced in hope, and were patient in tribulation; and internally happy, while externally miserable and wretched. The very same scenes, and objects, and circumstances, which destroy the peace and happiness of the men of the world, who live to themselves, promote the peace and happiness of christians, who live and die to the Lord, and who take him for their supreme portion. So that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace, whilst the way of transgressors is hard; and those who rob God of the love and service which he desires and requires,

in order to promote their own private, selfish happiness, wrong their own souls, and expose themselves to endless ruin.

4. If christians are willing to live and to die unto the Lord, in the manner that has been represented, then the christian's life is an exemplary life. It is just such a life as rational and dependent creatures ought to live in this present probationary state. So far as christians walk worthy of their high and holy vocation, they exhibit an example that all men ought to follow, and know that they ought to follow. They know, that they are all the creatures of God, who has made them for himself, who has sent his Son to redeem them from deserved and endless destruction, and who has continually loaded them with his benefits. And they know that these things bind them to the love and service of God, and forbid them to live to themselves. They know, therefore, that christians who appear to live to God, and are willing to die to God, set them an example which they ought to approve and to follow, and which continually condemns them for living to themselves. The apostle exhorts men to follow the example of departed christians. "Be ye followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises." But it is no less proper for those who are living to themselves, to reform, and follow *living* christians, who appear willing both to live and to die unto the Lord. Those who live with living christians will have much to answer for, if they do not follow their truly christian example.

5. If christians are willing to live and to die unto the Lord, then their death, though a gain to them, is a loss to the world. They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and their departure out of it tends to increase moral darkness and corruption among men. They can hardly be spared in any condition or stage of life. The world need both their exertions and examples, and may suffer much by the loss of them, though in some cases they may view their removal as a favor. The death of any real christian in any place is a melancholy event, and ought to be lamented; not only by near relatives and friends, but by all who know that the godly are the excellent of the earth, and the instruments which God employs to promote his great and gracious designs. Many seem to be willing that the righteous should be taken away, if they are only willing to die to the Lord; not considering that they may be taken away from the evil to come, when they may most sensibly feel the need of their presence and assistance.

6. If real christians are willing to live and to die unto the Lord, then they are willing to bury their christian friends who die to the Lord, whenever they are called to the trial. Those,

and those only, who are willing to bury themselves, are willing to bury their friends, who die in the Lord. They are willing to go where their christian friends are gone. They believe that they are gone to heaven, and they are willing to follow whenever they are called to follow them. Those who are not willing to die to the Lord choose to stay behind and lament their death, and not to go where they are supposed to be. When Christ told his disciples of the death of Lazarus, "Then said Thomas unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go that we may die with him." This was the natural impulse of a christian's heart towards a dying christian. And this is still the natural impulse of a christian heart towards a dying christian friend. All christians must be willing that their fellow christians should go, where they are willing and desirous to go themselves. But none can be willing that their friends should go where they dread to go themselves. Christians feel a submission under the bereavement of christian friends, that sinners never do nor can feel.

This subject now calls upon all to inquire whether they are real christians. Have they ever been willing to live to God, and to be his dutiful servants? A chil dknows whether he has been dutiful to his parents. A servant knows whether he has been faithful to his master. Why then cannot a creature know whether he has been dutiful to his Creator? Have you then been dutiful to your Creator? Have you been willing to be his creature, and to live in obedience to his commands, and in submission to his government? Have you been willing to die to him? You have been sick; how have you felt? You have been bereaved of christian friends; how have you felt? This question it concerns all to answer; but especially the present mourners. They are numerous, and death has come very near to some of you. God is now trying your hearts, and gives you peculiar opportunities to know whether they are right or wrong in his sight. This is next to your last trial, when you must die to yourselves, or to God. Are you prepared for that trial? You are, if prepared for the present trial; but not otherwise. Your case is critical; your duty imperious. Be still, and know that you are the creatures of God, and be willing to be so.

# SERMON XV.

## DIVINE PROVIDENCE INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

DEATH OF HON. ALFRED METCALF: FEBRUARY 27, 1830.

THY way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. — PSALM lxxvii. 19.

THE author of this psalm describes his troubles, and the conflicts of his mind under them. He represents his distress to be so great, that he could neither sleep nor speak. At first, he murmured and repined, and called the kindness and compassion of God in question. But he soon checked himself for it, and said: "This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." And when he reflected upon the marvellous goodness of God in leading his people through the Red sea, by the hand of Moses and Aaron, he was convinced of the absurdity and impiety of censuring the ways of providence, which are incomprehensible by mankind in this dark and imperfect state. This he acknowledges before God in the strongest terms. "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." The figure here is taken from a ship in the sea, whose path cannot be traced by any marks it leaves behind. So God is unsearchable in the ways of his providence, and the reasons of his conduct cannot be discovered by any human eye.

The truth which now falls under our consideration is this: That God is incomprehensible in the ways of his providence. I shall,

I. Show that God does exercise a universal providence over the world. And,

II. That he is incomprehensible in the exercise of his universal providence.

I. I am to show that God does exercise a universal providence over the world.

By the providence of God, we are to understand his preserving and governing all things; or, as we have always been taught, "it is his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions." It was impossible for God in creating the world, to give it an independent existence or the power of self-preservation. Independence is an incommunicable attribute of the Deity, which he cannot bestow upon any created object. Though he can bring both rational and irrational objects into existence out of nothing, yet he cannot give them power to support their own existence, independently of his almighty supporting hand. For it requires the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of God, as much to preserve the world in existence, as to give it existence at first. The Preserver of the world must know all things that are made; must be present with all things that are made, and uphold all things that are made; and therefore, none but the ever-present, all-wise, and powerful Creator can be the constant Preserver of the world. We have precisely the same evidence from the light of nature that God preserves, as that he made the world. God knew, when he created the world, that he could not put it out of his own hands a single moment, without destroying it; for he knew that he had hung the earth upon nothing but his own almighty, supporting hand. God knew when he created all things, that not one thing would exist any longer than he exerted his omnipotence to preserve its existence; and that if he designed that any part of his rational or irrational creation should exist for ever, he must constantly and eternally exert his omniscient eye and almighty arm for their preservation. To human appearance, the work of preserving the world is a vastly greater work than the work of creation; for God finished the work of creation in six days, but he will not finish the work of preservation to all eternity. It was not necessary that God should create the world; but it is absolutely necessary that he should preserve it for ever, in order to answer the ultimate end of its existence. And to answer the same end, it is no less necessary that God should exercise a universal government over the world he has created, and constantly preserves.

No material object can move, and no living creature can act, without the constant and controlling agency of him who made and preserves the world. God can no more give independent motion or independent activity to his creatures, than he could give independent existence to his creatures. They must all necessarily live and move, as well as have their being

in him. The light of nature affords us the same evidence that God preserves and governs all things, as that he has made all things. But there are many who acknowledge that God made the world, and does constantly and universally preserve it, that yet deny that his governing providence is universal. Not only deists, but even christians, deny the universality of divine providence. They suppose that God governs the more important objects in the natural world, and the more important events in the moral world, but takes no care of less important objects and events, which they deem unworthy of his care and attention. This is a palpable absurdity; for it is impossible to conceive that God should oversee and govern the whole world, and not oversee and govern all its parts. And if we look into the Bible, we find that God is there represented as causing the regular succession of day and night, winter and summer, seed-time and harvest; as causing the winds to blow, and the rain to fall; as causing health and sickness, life and death, prosperity and adversity; as causing joy and sorrow, moral good and moral evil; as taking care of the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; as governing the hearts and directing the steps of every individual of mankind; and as protecting David from the paw of the lion and the bear, and the javelin of Saul; preserving Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the fiery furnace; Daniel in the lions' den; and Jonah in the whale's belly. The scripture represents God as preserving and governing every creature and every object, whether rational or irrational, whether great or small, and whether good or evil, in every part of his extensive dominions. The preserving and governing providence of God extends to every thing that he has created. A sparrow falls not to the ground without his notice and direction, and the hairs of our heads are all numbered. God suffers nothing to take place, either in the natural or moral world, by negligence or permission. His providence is nothing less than his wise and powerful governing all his creatures and all their actions.

I now proceed to show,

II. That God is incomprehensible in the exercise of his universal providence. This will appear from various considerations. And,

1. From express declarations of scripture. The text declares that his way is in the sea, his path in the mighty waters, and his footsteps are not known. Zophar demands, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know?" Elihu puts this solemn question to Job, "Why dost thou strive against him?

for he giveth not account of any of his matters." Solomon says, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Christ says to his apostles, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." The wise man says, "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." Again he says, "Then I beheld all the work of God, that no man can find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek it out, yet shall he not find it; yea, farther, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it out." And the apostle exclaims, in the view of the divine incomprehensibility, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" These declarations of scripture are perfectly agreeable to our natural conceptions of our Creator; for it is as impossible for us to know the reasons why he preserves and governs us as he does, as to know why he has made us what we are. No intelligent creatures in the universe can know why God has made them as they are, unless he pleases to inform them; nor can they know why he governs them as he does, unless he pleases to inform them. And he has told us in his word, that "he giveth not account of any of his matters." And we have good ground to believe that he never will make known the reasons of his conduct in creation and providence, until the great and last day. Then Christ assures us that we shall know what we know not now. God is doubtless as incomprehensible in the dispensations of his providence towards angels, as he is in the dispensations of his providence towards mankind in this world. As God made the world, in a manner, above the comprehension of all his intelligent creatures, so he has a right to govern it and does govern it, in a manner above their comprehension.

2. It appears to be a dictate of reason, that God is incomprehensible in the exercise of his universal providence. Reason and scripture both teach us, that God governs all things systematically. He formed, as a wise agent, the whole plan of his conduct, before he began to create any material or immaterial object. His universal providence, therefore, is only carrying into execution his original comprehensive, consistent, and infinitely wise and benevolent design. Accordingly, the apostle expressly asserts, that "God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." His eternal purpose comprised all created beings, objects and events, and bound them together in one uniform, harmonious, and per-

fectly connected system; and this system he governs systematically, or just as he originally intended to govern it. There never has been, and never will be, one unconnected creature, object, or event, in any part of the universe, or in any period of duration. All things that ever have existed, or ever will exist, are constituent parts of one and the same great and perfect system. God intuitively and constantly sees the whole of this great and complicated system, and governs every particle and part of it in connection and conformity with the whole. He never suffers one link in this chain to be broken, nor one wheel in this machine to move slower or faster, or in any other direction, than he always intended. He governs all objects from the greatest to the smallest, and all creatures from the highest to the lowest; not as distinct and separate individuals, but as connected and constituent parts of his immense creation. Every dispensation of his universal providence, which is thus systematically administered towards any individual of mankind, may sensibly and deeply affect thousands and millions more. We know that this has been the case in times past. His dispensations towards Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, had a great and extensive influence upon their friends, their nation, and other nations for ages, and ages afterwards; and that influence still continues, and will continue to the end of the world. As God treated those eminent men systematically, so he treats every individual of the human race systematically. He always acts, in the dispensations of his providence, from reasons drawn from the greatest good of the whole intelligent system. Now if God always acts from these reasons, it is certain, to a demonstration, that he might appear incomprehensible in all the dispensations of his providence, to all his intelligent creatures; for they cannot comprehend these reasons without comprehending his whole system, and they cannot comprehend his whole system without possessing the same infinite wisdom that formed it. Though God always has wise and good reasons for all the dispensations of his providence towards kingdoms and nations, and smaller societies and individuals, yet no human wisdom can discover any of his wise and good reasons which he has not been pleased to reveal. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts higher than our thoughts. He has not told us why he converts one man and not another; why he sends the gospel to one nation and not to another; why he sends the sword to one kingdom and not to another; why he sends the pestilence to one city and not to another; why he sends sickness to one family and not to another; why he prolongs one person's life and shortens

another's; or why he treats almost every individual so differently at different times and in different respects. In these and ten thousand similar cases, the reasons of his conduct are past finding out, because they are derived from his supreme regard to the highest good of the whole universe, which is an object too large for any created beings to comprehend. It is the plain dictate of reason, that God is necessarily incomprehensible, both in forming his original purpose, and in carrying that purpose into execution in the course of his universal providence. As all the motions in a watch originate from the mainspring, so all the reasons of God's conduct, in preserving and governing the world, originate from his ultimate design in creation, which is too great, too wise, and too good, for any created being to grasp, and therefore must necessarily and for ever remain incomprehensible. I may add,

3. That this appears, not only from scripture and reason, but from fact. The ways of providence have always been found to be unsearchable, by all intelligent creatures. The angels, who are the greatest, the wisest and best of created beings, and who have been looking into, and scrutinizing the ways of providence for several thousand years, are still but beginning to learn what they will never fully comprehend. And if the inhabitants of heaven have never been able to comprehend the mysteries of providence, we may safely conclude that the inhabitants of this lower world have never been able to do it. Mankind have always had strong desires to pry into the designs of God, and especially into his designs in his conduct toward themselves. When he has sorely afflicted them, they have anxiously desired to know the reasons of his treating them with peculiar severity. Job wanted to know why God set him as a mark, and pointed the arrows of his wrath against him; but neither he nor his friends could discover the reasons of the divine conduct towards him. Jacob entirely misconstrued God's designs in the complicated evils he brought upon him. When he said, "all these things are against me," and will bring down my gray hairs to the grave, God was then seeking to promote his personal happiness, both in time and eternity. David could not discover the reasons why God treated the wicked so much better than the righteous, in this life. And the prophet Jeremiah acknowledged his ignorance upon this subject, and very submissively desired God to explain it. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" The godly have always been unable to explain the reasons of the superior prosperity of the ungodly. The whole world are still in the dark respecting the good and

evil that fall to the lot of the whole human family. The experience of all men in all situations of life plainly teaches them, that they cannot comprehend the ways of providence. There is scarcely a day passes, but every person sees something in respect to himself, or in respect to others, which excites his admiration, and surpasses his comprehension. So that scripture, and reason, and universal experience, concur to prove, that God governs the world incomprehensibly; and that his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not and cannot be known.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God be incomprehensible in the government of the world, then this is a complete answer to all the objections that have ever been made against his universal providence. It is extremely absurd for any of the creatures of God to complain of his making, preserving and governing them, as he has done. For he has created, preserved and governed them according to the counsel of his own will, or his eternal purpose, which was founded in infinite wisdom and goodness. He has always treated them, in all respects, as well as infinite wisdom and goodness could treat them. And surely there never has been any good ground to object against such treatment as this. But ever since the first apostacy, all mankind have been continually complaining of God, and saying, in their hearts at least, that the ways of the Lord are not equal. They have complained that he ever suffered sin and misery to come into the world; that he has suffered these evils to prevail so much in the world; and that he does more for one than for another, and too little for all. But who, in the whole circle of creation, "hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" It is as absurd for the highest as for the lowest of his creatures, to call the wisdom or goodness of his providence in question, without knowing the reasons of his conduct, which they cannot possibly know. His absolute incomprehensibility demonstrates that all their objections are founded in profound ignorance. If they knew all the reasons of God's conduct, they might be allowed to examine the ways of his providence; but to presume to examine and censure them, without knowing the infinitely wise and holy reasons upon which they are founded, is criminal folly and presumption. The incomprehensibility of God not only allows but obliges God to act as an absolute sovereign in governing the world. He always sees greater and better reasons for treating every one of mankind in the manner he does, than any which creatures can see for his not treating him

so; and therefore he is under moral obligations to act agreeably to his own perfect wisdom and goodness, rather than to act agreeably to the ignorance or imperfect wisdom and goodness of any of his creatures. It is at first view extremely absurd and criminal for any of mankind to feel or express a single objection or complaint against the perfectly wise, and holy and incomprehensible providence of God. Paul's answer to a particular objection of a particular objector, is sufficient to silence every objection that ever has been or can be made against divine providence. "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?"

2. If God be incomprehensible in his providence, then it is as difficult for mankind to know why he bestows favors upon them, as why he takes them away. God is continually filling the earth with his goodness, and bestowing ten thousand favors upon the children of men. But he bestows his favors upon different persons for very different reasons, which none of them can comprehend. While he sends prosperity to some, for their temporal, spiritual and eternal benefit, he sends prosperity to others to destroy them. Though God always has wise and good reasons for dispensing the blessings of providence, yet those who have the largest share of these blessings do not know the reasons why God bestows them upon them, and denies them to others. God both gives and takes away systematically, and his reasons for both originate from his supreme regard to the good of the whole of his intelligent creation, and not from any partiality he feels towards one person rather than another. He is no respecter of persons in giving, denying, or taking away favors. He may give in mercy, or take away in mercy; or he may give in judgment, or take away in judgment. And in all these cases, he has equally wise and good reasons for his conduct; but they are reasons derived from a source which the subjects of his favors and frowns cannot comprehend. Solomon considered, understood and declared all this: "That the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." Mankind are so fond of receiving good at the hand of God, that they seldom inquire why he bestows good upon them; but they are so reluctant to receive evil at the hand of God, that they are very anxious to know why he visits them with evil. It as much concerns them, however, to inquire why he bestows, as why he takes away favors. For the reasons of God's conduct in both cases may be the same. So Job thought and felt; and said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be

the name of the Lord." And when he was rebuked for saying this, he replied, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" With respect to the same person, God has the same reasons for giving and for taking away. When he gives in mercy, he takes away in mercy; and when he gives in judgment, he takes away in judgment. God is as incomprehensible in dispensing good, as in dispensing evil to mankind; and with respect to others, we never know whether God loves or hates them, merely by the dispensations of his providence towards them; and with respect to ourselves, we never know whether he loves or hates us, merely by the favors he gives, or denies, or takes away from us. But mankind are extremely apt to think, that prosperity and adversity are peculiar marks of God's love and hatred towards themselves and others. So Job's friends thought of God's providential dealings towards him. So those thought, who saw the viper fasten on Paul's hand. So those thought, who told Christ of the Gallileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. And so all men are apt to think of God's providential dealing towards themselves. But this is a great and dangerous error, because God dispenses good and evil in this world, not to distinguish his friends from his enemies, but to promote the highest good of the whole family of heaven and earth. And upon this ground, he has generally bestowed as great temporal favors upon the worst of mankind, as upon the best; and inflicted as great evils upon the best, as upon the worst. He is therefore as incomprehensible in the smiles as in the frowns of his providence. His reasons in both are absolutely unsearchable; and will remain so, until the revelation of his righteous judgment, and the reasons of the dispensations of his providence are unfolded to the view and apprehension of all his intelligent creatures.

3. If God be incomprehensible in all the ways of his providence, then all the dispensations of his providence towards mankind are proper trials. They never know his reasons for sending either prosperity or adversity; and therefore both prosperity and adversity are proper and equal trials whether they will submit to his absolute sovereignty. For aught they know, both his mercies and his frowns may be in judgment; and both equally try their understandings and hearts. Every dispensation of providence tries their understandings, whether they are willing to submit their wisdom to his, or their reasons to his reasons, which they are incapable of comprehending. They are extremely apt to lean to their own understandings, and to imagine that they know how God should treat them better than he knows. They are continually calling in ques-

tion the wisdom of God in the dispensations of his providence towards themselves and others. They imagine they see great and numerous errors in his universal government, and often stand and contend with their Maker about the wisdom and rectitude of his providence. And when they cannot dispute the wisdom, they will dispute the goodness of his conduct. They trust in their own hearts, as well as lean to their own understandings. They would persuade themselves, that if God were as kind, benevolent and compassionate as they are, he would not send either mercies or afflictions in judgment. Their selfish hearts rise against his benevolent heart, and their partial goodness against his impartial and universal goodness. They would regard the good of one individual more than the good of the whole universe. Now it is easy to see that while God in the dispensations of his providence regards the good of all more than the good of any individual of his creatures, he continually counteracts the imperfect wisdom and imperfect goodness of mankind; which is a constant trial, whether they will submit their understandings to his understanding, and their hearts to his heart. His bestowing good is as great a trial to them as his inflicting evil. They are continually complaining of his treating one person better than another, and lavishing his favors upon the most apparently unworthy objects. God knows that all these things are trials to mankind; but he knows that his incomprehensible wisdom and goodness require him to try all the children of men by every dispensation of his providence.

4. If God be incomprehensible in his ways of providence, then there is the same ground of submission under heavy, as under light afflictions. No affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous. God never requires men to submit to any natural evils or afflictions in themselves considered. He hates all natural evil as really as moral evil, and therefore never afflicts willingly, or grieves the children of men. He takes no pleasure in their pain, and he never requires them to take pleasure in pain itself, which is naturally impossible. But he does require them to submit to him, in all the pains and calamities which he inflicts upon them, because he always has wise and good reasons for every natural evil he inflicts upon them. He has as wise and good reasons for trying them with heavy, as with light afflictions; and therefore they have the same ground of submission under the heaviest, as under the lightest trials. They ought to bow their understandings to his understanding, and their hearts to his heart, under every trial. They are under the same obligation to submit to God, when he takes away all their earthly blessings, as when he takes away only a part.

Job viewed himself as entirely stripped, and was entirely submissive. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." God never inflicts any evils upon mankind inadvertently, or unintentionally. He always sends afflictions in exact weight and measure, and means to give them all the pains and sorrows which they actually feel under his afflictive hand. And though he does not require them not to feel his heavy hand, yet he does require them to bow their understandings to his, and their wills to his, and cordially approve of his wise and good reasons for acting, which they cannot at present comprehend. The heavier afflictions are, the more they display both the incomprehensible wisdom and goodness of God. This wisdom and goodness never shine brighter than when they surpass and counteract the wisdom and goodness of this world. In great afflictions, God appears greater, wiser, and better than man. It is, therefore, really easier to exercise true submission, under heavy, than under light afflictions, and it is highly probable that mankind do more frequently and sincerely submit to heavy, than to light trials. And consequently, they must be more inexcusable, if they refuse to be comforted under heavy, than under light affliction.

5. If the ways of providence are incomprehensible, then all things in this world are suited to make all men religious. God carries them all in his holy and sovereign hand, and is practically speaking to them every day and every moment. Every object they see, every good they enjoy, and every evil they suffer, concur to teach them their absolute dependence upon God, and their constant and indispensable duty to regard the operations of his hand, and the operations of their hearts under it. The blessings he gives, and the blessings he takes away, call upon them to bless his holy name. His providence is a plain and intelligible comment upon his word. They may every day read his supremacy and their dependence, in his providence, as plainly as in his word. They may almost every day read their frailty and mortality in his providence, as plainly as in his word. They may continually read the vanity and uncertainty of all earthly good as plainly in his providence, as in his word. And they may continually read the importance of their securing the love, the presence, the assistance, and the enjoyment, of God, in his providence, as plainly as in his word. If, therefore, any do not see, love, obey, and enjoy God, under his instructive providence, they are altogether criminal and inexcusable, and constantly exposed to be

destroyed by their prosperity, and the innumerable blessings God is constantly pouring into their bosoms.

6. If God is incomprehensible in his providence, then it is easy to see how all things will certainly work together for good to them who love him. Infinite wisdom and infinite goodness can order things, so as to bring light out of darkness, good out of evil, and joy out of sorrow. And those who know that they love God, may know that all the evils and fiery trials they are called to experience, shall ultimately terminate as Jacob's, and Joseph's, and Job's troubles did. They will all be the means of their future and eternal benefit. To this source of consolation let me now turn the attention of those who appear as mourners this day. The father and his family are called to experience a heavy and sore bereavement. God has taken away from them an amiable son and brother. But they have reason to be thankful that God spared him so long, and raised him to a station of so much dignity and usefulness. Judge METCALF was undoubtedly a useful man where he lived,* and as long as he lived. But God has answered his own purposes by both his life and death, and by the afflictions which have flowed and will flow from his premature decease in the midst of his days. The duty and the happiness of his bereaved friends are now inseparately connected. Their duty is to be still, and know that the Lord is God, and their happiness must flow from this only source of consolation. God has done right, and if they only feel right under his unsearchable providence, they will always have ground to bless God for giving and taking away the dear object of their affection. This instance of mortality in connection with the late instances of mortality call aloud upon persons of every age, character, and station, to prepare for their great and last change.

* Natchez, Miss.

# SERMON XVI.

## WISDOM OF HEARING THE VOICE OF AFFLICTION.

MARCH 5, 1820.

THE Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it. — MICAH, vi. 9.

JERUSALEM was the capital of Judea. To that city God directed the tribes of Israel to repair for his public worship. There his sacred oracles were deposited, read, explained, and inculcated. There every species of religious instruction was given from Sabbath to Sabbath. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were laid under the strongest obligations of obedience to all the divine commands; and, consequently, when they were disobedient, God usually sent his prophets to reprove them, and warn them of their danger of falling under the tokens of the divine displeasure, and through them, to reprove and warn the whole nation. Accordingly, the prophet Micah was sent to the sinners in Zion, to urge upon them the duty and importance of hearing the voice of God speaking to them by the rod of his wrath. This message the prophet delivers in the words of the text. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." Though these words are highly figurative, yet they suggest several things which are worthy of particular and serious consideration.

I. That God appoints every affliction that men experience.

II. That every affliction has an instructive voice.

III. That it is a point of wisdom to hear the instructive voice of affliction.

I. I am to show that God appoints every affliction that men

experience. Though man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward, yet affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground. God takes care of every one of mankind from the cradle to the grave, and never suffers any affliction to fall upon them by accident, or blind, unmeaning chance. Though he afflicts every one, yet he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is only if need be, that he afflicts them; and when he afflicts them, he orders the time, the place, the circumstances, the nature, and the degree, of every affliction, according to his original and eternal purpose, which he formed in unerring wisdom and perfect goodness. He always acts agreeably to the counsel of his own will, in every evil he inflicts, as well as in every good he bestows. He claims the right of acting as a sovereign, in dispensing both good and evil to mankind. "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." Hence the prophet asks, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" All the afflictions, and sorrows and sufferings of Christ, were brought upon him, according to the eternal appointment of God. This the evangelist expressly asserts. "For of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." Under the Old Testament, God often foretold the afflictions and calamities which he was about to bring upon mankind, which implies that they were fore-appointed; for they could not have been foretold, unless they were fore-determined. God's hand, which wields the rod of his wrath, is always guided by his unerring and pre-determinate counsel. He never strikes any person but whom he pre-determined to strike, nor inflicts a heavier wound than he pre-determined to give. He measures the tears and weighs the sorrows of the afflicted, before he afflicts them. Though God does not, at this day, foretel any afflictions or calamities which he brings upon a kingdom, or nation, or city, or family, or any particular person, yet we have sufficient evidence that every affliction, which we either see or feel, is a stroke of his rod, which is always guided by his unerring and pre-determinate counsel. This is not only a plain and important, but a practical truth; and lays the only solid foundation for support and consolation under all the afflictions we are called to endure, in this present evil world.

I now proceed to show,

II. That every affliction has an instructive voice. This is plainly intimated by the figurative expression in the text.

"Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it." God would not call upon men to hear the voice of his rod, if his rod had no voice. Men often speak as plainly by what they do, as by what they say. And God often speaks as plainly by his rod, as by his word. God speaks as plainly, as significantly, and as impressively, by the rod of his wrath, as by the most solemn denunciations of his displeasure. Elihu supposed that God was speaking to Job, by the voice of his providence, and reproved him for not regarding it. "Behold, in this thou art not just; I will answer thee that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? For he giveth not account of any of his matters. For God speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not." Though every affliction has a voice, which is the voice of God, yet the afflicted, who feel the smart of his rod, are not apt to perceive or understand the instructive voice of it. God declares that he means to teach and does teach by his providence. "Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the holy one of Israel, I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit;" that is, by my providence. And Elihu emphatically asks, "who teacheth like him?" Though men are naturally apt "not to regard the works of the Lord, nor the operations of his hand," yet every affliction has a voice which is designed and calculated to teach them what they always need to learn. It is true, that every affliction is painful and disagreeable in its own nature; but afterwards it may yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. All afflictions, and especially those which may be properly called bereavements, may be very instructive and profitable.

For, in the first place, they directly tend to teach the afflicted their entire dependence upon God. This they are naturally insensible of, and need to be taught by the voice of the rod. Men are born, as Job says, like the wild ass's colt. They naturally grow up and live, estranged from their Creator, Preserver and Benefactor. If they early hear of God, and know something about him, they like not to retain God in their knowledge. They choose to forget and forsake him as much as possible. They inwardly say to God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." They endeavor to live without God in the world, and to think as little about their dependence on him, and obligations to him, as the instructions they have received will allow them. And with respect to many it is strictly true, that God is not in all their thoughts. They feel, and live, and act, as though they were absolutely independent of him, and not accountable to him for any of their conduct. Nor will what they see, and hear, and read, and

enjoy, raise their thoughts to him, in whom they live, and move, and have their being. But when God comes near to them, and afflicts them, by taking a father, or mother, or wife, or son, or daughter, or any other object that lies near their hearts, he effectually teaches them what they never would learn before, and makes them realize that they were dependent upon him, for what he had given them and taken away. Men must learn their dependence on God, before they can be happy, either in this life or in that which is to come. The voice of affliction instantaneously taught Job this important truth. The first words that he uttered after he was completely stripped of all his earthly comforts were, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." He then more sensibly felt his dependence upon God for every good, than he ever did before. And thousands have been taught the same lesson by the voice of the rod.

In the next place, the voice of affliction tends to teach mankind the vanity of all earthly enjoyments. Though God has told them in his word that all things on earth are vain, uncertain, and unworthy of their supreme attention and regard, yet they will imagine that the world will make them happy. Their great inquiry is, who will show us any temporal good? And if God grants them outward prosperity, and pours the blessings of his providence upon them, they are ready to think that their mountain stands strong, that their happiness is secure, and that they shall never see corruption. Their hearts become wedded to the world. But when God chastens them with the rod of correction, and takes away one earthly blessing after another by his bereaving hand, they are ready to adopt the language of Job: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither;" or to say with Solomon, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Every one has his portion of the world; and when God comes and takes away a part or the whole of his portion, he takes away a part or the whole of this world from him; and then he sees nothing but vanity here on earth. This is often verified by the conduct of the afflicted and bereaved, who become entirely disconsolate and indifferent to all earthly objects, because God has taken away some intimate friend, or some near relative or connection. When God afflicts, he spreads a gloom over the whole world, and especially in respect to the afflicted; and makes them realize what he has told them in his word, and what he has told others in his providence, that all things on earth are vain, uncertain and delusive. This is a truth which the afflicted always need to learn. It is highly necessary that both the young and the old should realize that the fashion of this world is continually passing away, and that no dependence can

be safely placed upon any of its enjoyments, hopes, or prospects.

Again, the voice of affliction naturally tends to turn the thoughts of the afflicted upon the most serious and solemn subjects. When the world appears vain, other things appear weighty and important; when vain thoughts are banished from the mind, serious thoughts will enter; when temporal things lose their lustre, eternal things will assume their importance, and fix the whole soul in solemn reflections and anticipations. Affliction had this effect upon the mind of David. He says, "I was dumb with silence: I held my peace, even from good, and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breath, and mine age is as nothing before thee; verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Surely, every man walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." "I was dumb. I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely, every man is vanity." This effect of affliction is often very visible and striking. How often do we find the afflicted sitting silent and thoughtful, and fixing their whole attention upon future and eternal things, which they had long endeavored to banish from their minds. The day of adversity is the day to consider; and, in such a day, very few can refrain from thinking, and from thinking seriously too. This is one of the natural and salutary effects of divine corrections. Those who are bereaved of near and dear friends and connections, naturally follow them, in their thoughts, into eternity, whither they are gone, and from whence they will never return. And, before they are aware, they find their minds absorbed in the solemn scenes and objects of the invisible and eternal world. And the more they think, the more they feel; and the more they feel, the more they think. And such serious thoughts and impressions often remain until their hearts are softened and sanctified, and they are prepared both for living and dying. How often do afflictions prepare the way for awakenings, convictions and conversions! Prosperity dissipates the thoughts; but adversity collects, composes and fixes them upon proper objects. It is the natural tendency of affliction to promote the spiritual benefit of the afflicted and bereaved. Accordingly, Eliphaz had reason to say, "Happy is the man whom God correcteth." Thus it appears, that every

affliction has a voice, which is very instructive, and may be very useful. Therefore,

III. It is always a point of wisdom to hear the instructive voice of affliction. This is plainly implied in the text. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." The Lord cried to the city, by the voice of his rod; and the voice of his rod was the voice of affliction, which was designed to instruct, to reform, and save every one who wisely heard, understood, and improved it. Now that it is a point of wisdom in the afflicted, to hear the voice of the rod that afflicts them, will appear, if we consider,

1. That the voice of affliction is the voice of God. It is God who always speaks by the rod of correction; and his voice is clothed with infinite authority. There is none that can speak and teach like him. He has always been teaching all men in the school of his providence; and it is a point of the highest wisdom in every man to hear his providential instructions. They flow from infinite wisdom and goodness, and are always suited to the character, and state, and capacity, of the afflicted. If they are only disposed to hear the voice of their Creator, they cannot fail of receiving useful instruction. The man of wisdom will always grow wiser by the instructive voice of affliction. David, after reflecting upon the various dispensations of divine providence, remarks, "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." It is the indispensable duty of the afflicted to hear the voice of affliction. God commands them to do it, in the text. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." They are under stronger obligations to hear the voice of his rod, than the voice of his word; for he employs the voice of his rod only because the still, small, mild voice of his word has been disregarded. Hence he said of his people of old, "I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." The men of wisdom, who see and know the name of God; that is, those who know and love the character, perfections and government of God; will hear, understand and obey the voice of the rod of his wrath, which is his most solemn, imperious and impressive voice.

2. It is a point of wisdom in the afflicted to hear the voice of affliction, because to refuse to hear it will be highly displeasing to God. For this, he often complains of his ancient people. He says by Isaiah, "The people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts." And he puts this solemn question to them: "Why should ye

be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." Jeremiah cries with the voice of lamentation, "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the earth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive instruction; they have made their faces harder than a rock: they have refused to return." These examples of refusing to hear the voice of God in afflictions, are recorded for our warning and instruction, to deter us from displeasing God, by disregarding the voice of his chastising rod.

3. It is a point of wisdom in the afflicted to hear the voice of affliction, because by refusing to hear it, they will expose themselves to still severer marks of the divine displeasure. So long as any are stupid, or obstinate, under the correcting hand of God, he usually continues and increases his corrections, until they know and acknowledge the rod and him who has appointed it. This has been his usual mode of treating nations and individuals in ages past; and he still pursues the same course in the dispensations of his providence. How often do we see afflictions, bereavements and fiery trials following one another in a thick and overwhelming succession! One affliction seems to be a presage of another; and while the unaffected and unresigned fly from the iron weapon, a bow of steel strikes them through. If the afflicted neglect or refuse to hear the voice of God speaking to them in his providence, they have reason to expect that he will say, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and ye have not regarded; therefore ye shall eat the fruit of your own ways, and be filled with your own devices." Besides,

4. The afflicted never know when God calls to them by the voice of his rod, but that it is the last call he will ever give them, before he calls them into eternity. This is more especially to be expected by those whom he has most often and most loudly called by the bereaving strokes of his rod. When he has made breach after breach in a family, and taken away one parent after another, or one brother and sister after another, or one aged friend after another; the survivors have ground to expect that they may be soon taken, without any farther or louder calls. They must justly think that God will judge that he has done enough on his part to prepare them to leave the world, whether they have, or have not, set their souls and houses in order. It seriously concerns them to stand in a waiting and prepared posture for death, and improve the voice of his rod to their own good, and to his glory.

I now proceed to improve the subject.

1. If God appoints every affliction for the purpose of instructing the afflicted; then he can instruct those who are the most

unwilling to be instructed. All men naturally hate religious instruction. They say unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." There are a vast many, who live in a gospel land and enjoy gospel privileges, that take pains to avoid gospel instruction. Though they have the gospel in their hands, they will not read it. Though they might hear the gospel explained and inculcated, they will not be where they might hear it explained and inculcated. But if God can speak to whom he pleases by the voice of his providence, then he can teach whom he pleases by his own voice, however unwilling they are to hear him. Though they refuse to meet at the places he has appointed for their instruction, yet he can meet them wherever they are, and speak to them by a voice which they must feel, as well as hear. He spoke to Pharaoh by the voice of his rod, which he could not help hearing and feeling. He spoke to Manasseh by the rod of his wrath, which gave him saving instruction. God can direct the rod of correction to any family, or to any person, whom he has determined to correct and instruct, and every affliction will infallibly answer the purpose for which it is appointed and sent. Afflictions are all appointed; they are all sent according to appointment; and they all answer the ends of their appointment. If they are appointed to awaken, they will awaken; if they are appointed to convince, they will convince; if they are appointed to convert, they will convert; if they are appointed to edify, they will edify; or if they are appointed to stupify and harden, they will produce this effect. God has appointed all men to affliction and trouble, as he has appointed the sparks to fly upward; and he has appointed as many and as great afflictions for every person as he saw necessary to employ, as means to form his character for eternity; and he forms every person for his future and eternal state, by the instructions of his providence, as well as by the instructions of his word. All men are constantly in the school of providence, where God has appointed to instruct them, whether they desire to be instructed, or not. There is no ground to despair of the saving instruction of any whom God has appointed to salvation. If some disbelieve the Bible, he can teach them to believe it, by his providence. If some disbelieve the essential doctrines of the Bible, he can teach them to believe those doctrines, by his providence. If some secrete themselves in the highways and hedges, and resolve to live in ease and security, he can teach them the depravity of their hearts, and their perishing condition, by his providence; and so compel them to come in, and hear and understand and embrace the gospel. As none are out of the reach of his rod, so none are out of the sound of its instructive

voice. How often does God send afflictions to those who are far from righteousness, and, in appearance, far from the kingdom of God; and cause those afflictions to carry saving instruction to such as have resolved never to hear the instructions of his word! God can teach those whom he afflicts, to profit by their afflictions, whether they are lighter or heavier; whether they are of a shorter or longer duration. It is a source of consolation, that all the afflictions we see or feel, are instructive, and will certainly answer the purposes for which they are appointed, and may prove the means of salvation to the afflicted.

2. If the voice of affliction be instructive, then all persons must be beneficially instructed, unless they use great efforts to prevent it. All persons will allow, that they have been afflicted, and many complain that they have had a large if not a double share of afflictions; but how few have received any beneficial instruction from them! How few have learned their dependence on God! How few have learned the vanity of the world! How few have learned to live as dying and accountable creatures! Though God has spoken to them by the voice of his providence more than once, or twice, or a thousand times, yet they have neither perceived, nor understood, nor received, the instruction he has given them. They have been as deaf as the adder, and as stupid as the horse or mule, which have no understanding. To what is this to be ascribed? It cannot be ascribed to their want of eyes to see the hand of God, nor to their want of ears to hear the voice of his rod, nor to their want of reason to understand its voice, nor to their want of conscience to feel their obligations to obey it. It cannot be ascribed to any thing but to the depravity of their hearts, which leads them to hate and resist divine instruction. They cannot help hearing the rod, and who hath appointed it, without exerting strong and vigorous efforts to prevent it. It is easy for men to resist the voice of God in his word. It is easy to resist his voice in his merciful providence; but it requires great efforts to resist his voice in his afflictive providence. Accordingly, Solomon represents a sinner as resisting the most powerful means used to reform and convert him. "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." Jacob is represented as equally incorrigible, by the voice and smart of the rod: "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his way, neither were they obedient unto his law; therefore he hath poured upon them the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle; and it hath set

him on fire round about, yet he knew it not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart." And Zachariah represents the same people as using their most vigorous efforts to prevent their hearing the voice of God's instructive rod. "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone." This is no exaggerated description of the afflicted under the correcting and instructive hand of Providence. Do not the afflicted at this day very often employ the very same methods to prevent their hearing the voice and instruction of the most speaking dispensations of Providence? Do they not refuse to hearken? Do they not pull away the shoulder? Do they not stop their ears to prevent hearing? Do they not make their hearts as adamant, to prevent their being softened and subdued? Had not all the afflicted used some or all these methods to divert their attention, stupify their conscience, and harden their hearts, under the repeated and heavy strokes of God's chastising rod, they would all have received beneficial if not saving instruction. Where is the person that has not been afflicted? This is a sighing, groaning, weeping world, and would be a penitent world, did not the afflicted put forth vigorous efforts to prevent hearing and feeling the powerful and instructive voice of afflictions, and of him who has appointed them.

3. If God himself instructs the afflicted by the voice of his rod, then they never can have any excuse for not hearing his instructions. Many find or think they find some imperfection or impropriety in human instructions. Children often imagine they discover something improper in parental instruction, which affords some excuse for disregarding it. People often suppose they see something improper in the time, mode or matter of the instructions of their teachers, which excuses them from obeying their instructions. But no such imperfection or impropriety can be found in divine instructions. God never instructs but when there is need of instruction. He never instructs in an improper manner. And he never gives any improper instructions. Whenever God employs the rod of instruction, he directs it to the proper persons, at a proper time; and uses it just as long, and no longer, than the afflicted need it. Why then should a living man ever complain of instructive afflictions? Those who are the oftenest and most severely afflicted, have no reason to complain of the nature, time, manner, weight, or duration of their afflictions. What if it be true with respect to some, that there is no sorrow like unto their sorrow, and no afflictions like unto their afflictions, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted them in the day of his fierce anger? Have they any reason to complain? Has God brought any affliction upon them, but

what he in infinite wisdom and goodness appointed to bring upon them? And can they have any reason to complain of any afflictions which infinite wisdom and goodness have appointed? What excuse can they have for not hearing and obeying the voice of God's correcting and instructive rod, when he uses it at the best time, and in the best manner?

4. If it be a point of wisdom in the afflicted, to hear the instructive voice of the rod, then it argues want of wisdom in them to refuse to hear it. There are good reasons, we have seen, for the afflicted to hear the voice of afflictions. They teach our dependence upon God, the vanity of the world, and the importance of living and acting as dying and accountable creatures. And all these reasons for hearing, are so many reasons against refusing to hear, the instructive voice of God's correcting rod. The afflicted often imagine that it is a point of wisdom to stop their ears, that they may not hear the voice of God in his afflictive providence; and presume to contend with him under his chastising rod. But this is extreme folly. "God is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?" The afflicted are extremely unwise to refuse the instruction which they need, and which God is giving them at the best time, and in the best manner. And God himself tells them so in his word. "He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth." "Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction." "He that refuseth instruction, despiseth his own soul." It is not beneath the afflicted, whether old or young, whether high or low, whether rich or poor, to stoop under God's chastising rod, and receive instruction in the way he sees fit to give it. And when he gives it in the way most self-denying to himself, as well as to them, they are under peculiar obligation to receive it thankfully and submissively. They have reason to be grateful that God will employ the severer instructions of his rod, when the milder instructions of his word are insufficient to bring them to their duty. The instructions which God gives by bereavements are much more valuable and important to the afflicted, than any favors he takes away from them. To refuse to hear the instruction of afflictions is therefore more unwise, than to refuse to accept the best of temporal blessings. If they are willing to receive good at the hand of the Lord, they ought to be much more willing to receive evil at his hand; which, at the time they are afflicted, is better for them than any temporal favor infinite wisdom and goodness can then bestow upon them. The folly of refusing to hear the instruction of adversity is always unwise, in proportion to the wisdom of God

who inflicts it. And this folly they will certainly sooner or later regret. Thousands have regretted it, when it was too late. This, the afflicted ought to realize, and sincerely guard against.

5. If afflictions are instructive, then the afflicted are always in a peculiarly trying and dangerous situation. They must receive or refuse to receive instruction. And it is more natural for all the afflicted to refuse than to receive instruction that is given to them under the smart of the rod. They are very ready to complain, rather than to submit to the correcting hand of God. This is the representation of scripture. This is evident by observation, and this is still more evident by the experience of all mankind. The afflicted need to tremble under the instructive voice of affliction, lest they disregard, despise, and abuse the chastenings of the Lord. They are in danger of feeling more and heavier strokes of the rod. They are emphatically in a state of trial. God watches every motion of their hearts, and every word that drops from their lips. And his hand is stretched out, still ready, if need be, to give heavier and heavier strokes, or to leave them to perish in their opposition, and perverse course of rebellion. They are shut up to submission, and must either submit or die. And when they feel this, they are under indispensable obligation to feel and say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."

Finally, this subject calls upon all to hear the voice of Providence, which crieth to the nations who are now groaning under the rod of affliction and calamity; to hear the voice of God, which crieth to the cities which are in trouble and distress; to hear the voice of God, which crieth to bereaved families, and which crieth to afflicted and bereaved individuals. The mourning family who now appear before us, have received a heavy stroke; the heaviest that the bereaved husband has ever felt. He has long enjoyed great prosperity; but adversity has now overtaken him. The cup of the wormwood and the gall is put into his hand, by him who had a right to bereave him. Let him be still, and know that he is God.

The bereaved children have suffered an irreparable loss. She who bore them in her arms, and watched over their infancy, childhood and youth, is taken from them for ever. They shall no more see her face, nor hear her voice, nor enjoy her maternal example or instructions. This is a loud call, not merely to remember their mother, but their Creator. Perhaps they never will have a louder call by the providence of God, to make their peace with him, and devote themselves to his service. The repeated instances of mortality of late, solemnly admonish all to prepare for death, which might be their lot.

# SERMON XVII.

## THE POWER OF GOD TO PREVENT DEATH.

OCTOBER 14, 1821.

THEN said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. — JOHN, xi. 21

WE are told in the preceding verses that a certain man was sick, named Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha; that these sisters of Lazarus sent to Christ, informing him that their brother was sick, confidently expecting that he would come and heal him, as he had done in other cases of sickness; that Christ designedly delayed going to Bethany to visit him, until after he died, and had lain in the grave four days; that as soon as Martha heard of his then coming, she went and met him, and accosted him in these words: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;" that she immediately called her sister Mary, and told her that the Master had come; that when Mary was come to Jesus, "she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." It seems that Martha and Mary both had the same opinion of Christ, that he was the Son of God, and that God would grant him whatever favor he would ask; and that if he had been present while their brother was sick, he would have asked God to spare his life, and prevent his death at that time. It is likely, therefore, that they often said to one another, "O that Christ were here! If he were here, he would ask God to heal our sick brother, and prevent his early death." This thought had made such a deep impression on their minds, that they both express it in the first words they said to Christ: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." They certainly had some reason to

think that if Christ had been present, he would have entreated with God to spare their brother's life, and God would have healed his disorder, and prevented his death. But they could not be certain that if Christ had been present, he would have interceded for their brother; or, if he had, that God would have granted his request, and spared their brother's life. Hence we may justly conclude,

That though God is able to prevent any person's dying at the time he does die, yet he never sees fit to prevent it. I shall show,

I. That God is able to prevent any person's dying so soon as he does die.

II. That he never does prevent any person's dying as soon as he does die. And,

III. Why he does never prevent any person's dying so soon.

I. I am to show that God is able to prevent any person's dying so soon as he does die.

As God is the giver, so he is the preserver of life. He giveth to all life and breath. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." He is as able to preserve one man's life, as another's; and all men's lives, as long as he pleases. And as he is able to preserve life as long as he pleases, so he is able to prevent death as long as he pleases. He preserved the lives of men much longer in former, than in latter ages. He preserved the lives of some of the patriarchs for seven, or eight, or nine hundred years; and he might have preserved their lives, and the lives of all their contemporaries, and the lives of all men since, much longer. Though Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years, yet he could have prevented his dying so soon, and caused him to live to this time, if he had pleased. His preserving one man's life longer than another's is a demonstration that he is able to preserve every man's life as long as he pleases. So long as he can preserve any man's life, he can prevent his death. As he could have preserved the life of Methuselah longer than he did, so he could have prevented his dying so soon as he did. And as he could have preserved the life of Lazarus longer than he did, so he could have prevented his dying as soon as he did. And it is equally true that he can preserve any man's life, and prevent any man's death, as long as he pleases, without any miraculous interposition in the case. Sickness is the most common and general cause of death. But God is able to preserve any man from sickness as long as he pleases. He promised his peculiar people that he would take away from them all sickness, in case of their cordial obedience to his commands. And he was undoubtedly able to have fulfilled this promise. He now preserves some men from sickness

for seventy, or eighty, or ninety years, or more. And this shows that he can preserve any man from dying by sickness as long as he pleases. But if men do become sick, and extremely sick, he can check, or mitigate, or remove their sickness, and so prevent its proving the means of their death. Hannah said, The Lord "bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." Hezekiah was sick, and his sickness would have proved mortal, if God had not directed to and blessed means for his recovery, by which he prevented his death for fifteen years longer. And God has, in ten thousand instances, healed the sick, and prevented their dying, not only for fifteen, but for fifty years longer. How often does God bring mankind down to the verge of the grave, by both lingering and acute diseases, and then bring them up again, and thereby prevent their dying as long as he pleases! Though men are continually exposed to lose their lives by what are called accidents, yet God can prevent any accident happening to them, as long as he pleases. Or if he does suffer accidents to happen to them, he is able to prevent their proving fatal. How often did David meet with accidents, and narrowly escape! He narrowly escaped from the paw of the lion and the bear; and still more narrowly escaped, time after time, from the hands of Saul, who took unwearied pains to destroy him. Paul was exposed to a vast variety of dangers and accidents, but escaped them all, and lived to be such an one as Paul the aged. All Germany were united in their designs and attempts to destroy Martin Luther; but yet he came to his grave in peace, like a shock of corn fully ripe in its season. And where can we find a man, who has lived to fifty years, who has not had some hair-breadth escapes from dangers and accidents, which have proved fatal to others? In all such cases, though God suffered the accidents to take place, yet he prevented their becoming fatal. And he can always do this when he pleases. It is easy to see, therefore, that God is able to preserve the lives of men as long as he pleases, and to prevent their dying so soon as they do die. But yet,

II. He never does prevent their dying as soon as they do die. Though he might have prevented Lazarus' dying so soon as he did die, yet he did not see fit to prevent his dying as soon as he did die. And this holds true in all cases of mortality. God never sees fit to prevent any person's dying as soon as he does die. He did not see fit to prevent Methuselah from dying as soon as he was nine hundred and sixty-nine years old. Nor did he see fit to prevent Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Aaron and Joshua, from dying as soon as they did die. He did not see fit to prevent Ahab and Josiah from

being wounded, nor from dying of their wounds, as soon as they did die. He did not prevent young Abijah from being sick, nor from dying of his sickness, as soon as he did die, though all Israel desired his life, and lamented his death. No means that can be used, and no intercessions that can be made, can move God to prevent any child, or youth, or man, from dying, as soon as he does die. Though he is able to prevent all infants from dying in infancy, and all children from dying in childhood, and all youths from dying before they arrive at manhood or old age, yet he does not see fit to prevent millions of infants from dying in infancy, nor millions of children from dying in childhood, nor millions of youth from dying before they arrive at manhood or old age. David desired and prayed ardently, that his little infant might live; but God did not prevent its dying. He also desired and ardently prayed, that his son Absalom might not be slain; but God did not prevent his being slain. Though pious parents sincerely pray that their infants may live to childhood, and their children may live to manhood, and to future years, yet God often sees fit not to prevent their infants from dying in infancy, nor their children from dying in childhood, nor their youths from dying in that period of life. And though many may offer up pious and ardent prayers for the lives of amiable and useful men, yet God often denies their requests, and does not prevent such pious men from dying in the midst of their usefulness. In a word, God never sees fit to prevent any one's dying as early in life as he does die.

I now proceed to show,

III. Why God does not prevent any person from dying, as soon as he does die. I have already shown that God can preserve men's lives as long as he pleases, and consequently that he can prevent their dying, as soon as they do die. Martha and Mary supposed this to be true; for they said to Christ, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." And others were of the same opinion. When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping who came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some said, Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Now, since God can preserve the lives of mankind as long as he pleases, it is a very serious and important inquiry, why he does not prevent so many from dying in infancy, childhood, youth and manhood, before they reach the common age of man. Early, or what are called premature

deaths, are the most fruitful sources of sorrows, sighs, groans and tears in this evil world. There seems to be a general willingness that those who are far advanced in years, and have lost their activity and apparent usefulness, should go off the stage of action, and leave room for others to come after them, and fill their places; but not so, in respect to the young, the amiable, and the useful. When these are cut down by the stroke of death, it disappoints many hopes, wounds many hearts, and excites a general sorrow. In all such cases, God foresees all the painful consequences, and might prevent them, by preventing so many persons from dying as soon as they do. Though we cannot assign all, yet we may safely assign some reasons, why God never prevents men from dying as soon as they do; though he foresees all the sorrows and afflictions which will finally flow from their dying in such particular stages of life. Here it may be observed,

1. That God does not prevent men's dying as soon as they do die, because he knows their appointed time to die is come. God has not only appointed to all men once to die, but he has also appointed the particular time when every one shall die. Job asserts, that the number of every man's months, and even days, are appointed, and the bounds are fixed that he cannot pass. He asks, "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days, also, like the days of an hireling?" David supposed that God had determined when he should die and finish his course of life. "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am." Solomon says, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." And again he declares, "Man knoweth not his time: as the fishes are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." The great diversity in the times of men's death indicates that the time is appointed when every one shall die by the hand of the great author of life. And so the apostle James expressly declares: "Go to, now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? it is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall live, and do this or that." Every one must die at the time God has appointed that he should die. God will certainly bring about every event which he has appointed to bring about, and at the time he has appointed. He has made all his appointments under the influence of unerring

wisdom and perfect goodness; and can never see any good reason for altering, or not acting according to, any one of his appointments. He knew from eternity that death would be an important event to every person, himself and to others; and he knew that it would be more important at one time than at another. He therefore appointed the time of every one's dying, which he saw to be the most proper and the most important time; and he never will deviate a moment from his appointed time, in bringing about any person's death. And this is a good reason why he never prevents any one from dying when his appointed time is come.

2. God does not prevent some from dying as soon as they do, because he sees it best for them to die then. He has a particular regard to their good, in respect to the day of their death. He knows what would be the consequences of their living any longer, and takes them away from the evils to come. He sees it to be best for some infants never to see and suffer the evils that they would see and suffer, if they should live any longer, and takes them away for their good. He sees it to be best for some children to die in their childhood, and never be exposed to the evils and calamities which would come upon them, as well as the world, if their lives should be any longer spared. This was probably one reason why God did not prolong the life of young Abijah, the son of Jeroboam. He said that he was then about chastising his undutiful people. God sees it to be best for some pious and promising youths to meet an early death, and escape later evils and dangers. God sees it to be best for some very excellent and useful men to be called out of the world, in the midst of their prosperity and usefulness, that they may escape the evils and infirmities of declining years. This was probably the reason why God did not prevent the early death of the amiable Jonathan, the useful Josiah, and the bold and zealous Zacharias, who perished between the altar and the temple. But there may be another reason why God so early removes pious, promising, useful men, and little children, from this evil world; and that is, to make them unspeakably more happy in the kingdom of heaven. This was undoubtedly the reason why he translated Enoch to heaven, before he had finished half a patriarchal life. He had a particular regard to Enoch's personal good in so early taking him to himself. And we may justly conclude that he does, in ten thousand instances, cut short the lives of the amiable and excellent, to promote their personal and eternal good.

3. God does not prevent some from dying so soon as they do, because he knows that their dying thus will be best for their surviving friends and acquaintance. "For us they sicken, and

for us they die." God has regard to the living as well as to the dying, in every instance of mortality. Many have done more good by dying, than they ever would or could do by living. The death of a child has often proved the means of conversion to the parents. The death of a brother or sister has often proved the means of the spiritual and eternal good of a brother or a sister, if not of both brothers and sisters. The death of the young often makes deep and lasting impressions on the minds of the living, whether they are fathers or mothers, brothers or sisters, friends or acquaintance, old or young. Sudden, unexpected, premature deaths are generally the most impressive, the most instructive, and the most beneficial, to those who are prepared, as well as to those who are unprepared for dying. And for this reason, probably, God does not prevent more than half mankind from dying before they have lived out half their days. Christ did not prevent Lazarus from dying as soon as he did, because he intended his death should be the means of spiritual and saving benefit to others. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." His death produced the salutary effects which Christ intended it should produce. It tried and purified the hearts of Martha and Mary, and not only so, but it brought some to saving faith and repentance. "Then many of the Jews who came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him." They saw Lazarus dead. They saw Martha and Mary and others mourning. They saw Jesus weep. And they saw Jesus raise the dead. And Christ meant that they should see and hear all these things, for the benevolent and gracious purpose of their believing in him to the saving of their souls. And how often does God produce such saving effects on the hearts of the living, by the death of the young, the promising, and the pious! I may add,

4. God does not prevent some from dying so soon as they do, because he has a peculiar and supreme regard to his own glory in their death. He never displays his superior wisdom, superior goodness, and his amiable, absolute sovereignty, more clearly and solemnly, than by taking away the lives of persons contrary to the desires, the hopes, the expectations and prayers of their nearest and dearest friends. By such instances of mortality, he displays a wisdom, a goodness, and a sovereignty, which infinitely surpasses the wisdom, the goodness, and the sovereignty, of any or all his intelligent creatures. Neither men, nor angels, if they had the government of the world, could dispose of the lives of men in the manner in which God has always been disposing of them. If the latter could weep,

they would have wept, as Christ did, at the death of Lazarus. God means to display his own glory before the eyes of angels, as well as of men, in causing death to reign without any apparent order, respecting the ages, the characters, and the conditions of mankind. And he has a sovereign right to take away any person, when, and where, and by what means, he pleases. "Behold," says Job, "he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, what doest thou?"

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God can preserve human life as long as he pleases, then it is proper to pray for the strength, and health, and recovery of the weak, the sick, the wounded, and the apparently dying, as long as the least spark of life appears to remain. As God can bring down to the grave, so he can bring up. As he can send weakness, so he can remove it. As he can send sickness, so he can remove it. As he can wound, so he can heal. And as he can give, so he can preserve life in its lowest state. What seems impossible with men, is often possible with God, in respect to the preservation of life. How often have the friends and the physicians of the weak, the sick, the wounded, and of the apparently dying and dead, despaired of their lives; and yet God has been pleased, after all their hopes and expectations were gone, to give them strength, and health, and even longevity. When Dr. Doddridge was born, he was supposed to be dead; but God preserved the spark of life in that critical and important moment, and raised him up to be one of the most eminent and useful men in his day. And have we not reason to believe that God has preserved the lives of many such weak and feeble creatures even to old age? How often does God prolong the lives of those who are apparently breathing their last, by sickness, or by wounds, or by swooning, or by drowning, or by the very decays of nature! This ought to teach us the propriety and importance of seeking to God to preserve the lives of those who apparently lie beyond the reach of all human means and exertions. As long as there is life, there is some ground to hope for recovery, and to pray for it. Neither the young nor the old ought to give up the desire and the hope of living. For God can preserve their lives as long as he pleases; and they may be assured that, for some reason or other, it will be best that they should live as long as God sees fit to preserve their lives. It is an indication of impatience, ingratitude, and irreconciliation to God, for any to omit praying for the continuance of their own life, or to desire others not to pray for it. Such instances frequently

occur; but all persons in such a state are to be better informed, and entreated to exercise and express unconditional submission to the gracious Giver and Preserver of life.

2. If God can and does preserve, or cut short life, just as he pleases, then we ought never to pray for the preservation of our own lives, or the lives of others, absolutely or unconditionally, in any case, or in any situation. We ought to rejoice that our own times, and the times of others, are in God's hands, and that he knows better than we do how to dispose of us and others. We have no right to pray absolutely that we may be kept from sickness; or, when we are sick, that we may be restored to health. We have no right to pray absolutely that we may be kept from danger; or, if we are in danger, that we may be preserved unhurt. And we have no right to pray for the preservation of others absolutely, in respect to sickness and danger. There is an important condition to be understood, and felt, and expressed. "If the Lord will," may our lives and health, and the lives and health of others, be preserved. Christ prayed conditionally in the view of his tremendous sufferings. "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." It seems to be the opinion of some that we have a right to pray for the preservation of life, and health, and any other temporal or spiritual blessing, absolutely and unconditionally, with full assurance that God will grant the particular favor we pray for. But this is contrary to scripture, and to the universal experience of the best christians. They are fully sensible that they never know beforehand what favors it is best for God to bestow, or for them to receive. This leads them to pray conditionally and submissively, May God grant us this or that favor. They may pray ardently for some particular favor; but if they are sincere, they more ardently pray that God would glorify himself, than gratify them. There is no supposable case, in which we have a right to pray absolutely and unconditionally, for life, or health, or any temporal or spiritual blessing. Our dependence and ignorance render it absurd and criminal for us to desire or pray for any thing unsubmissively and unconditionally.

3. If God can preserve or shorten the lives of all mankind, just as he pleases, then all ought to carry about with them a realizing sense that they are dying creatures. God has passed a sentence of death upon them, and appointed the time, the place, the means, and all the circumstances, of their dying, and drawn an impenetrable veil over all futurity. They know not what a year, or a month, or a day, may bring forth. It is as certain that they shall die, as that they are now alive; and it is equally

certain that they shall die at the time, the place, and under every circumstance, that God has appointed. Death is on his way to meet them, and he is an unavoidable, unresistible, and an unpitying enemy. How reasonable and how important is it, that they should realize their dying nature and dying condition! They are continually seeing the sentence of death carried into effect, among the young and the old, the strong and the feeble, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the useful and the useless. The arrows of death are constantly flying around them, and cutting down one and another on their right hand and on their left. It is criminal stupidity in the living, to forget that they are dying creatures. But such stupidity possesses the minds of the great majority of mankind. They feel, and live, and act, as though they thought they should never die. And God, who knows their inmost thoughts, has told them, they do think they shall never die. "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations." It must be exceedingly displeasing to God, for his dependent and dying creatures to indulge such vain, presumptuous and criminal thoughts. It becomes them to think more soberly and humbly of themselves, and realize that they are born to die, and are actually dying daily, and drawing nearer and nearer to the grave, and that vast eternity which lies beyond it. It is only for God, in whose hand their breath is, to withdraw his supporting hand, and they must cease to breathe. For "there is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war." Instead of boasting of to-morrow, every one ought to feel the spirit and speak the language of David. "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am." It is God alone, who can so teach us to number our days, as to apply our hearts unto wisdom. No one can act wisely for time or eternity, who does not habitually realize his frailty and mortality, and feel and act as a dying creature.

4. Since God can preserve or cut short the lives of men, just as he pleases, death commonly comes to them unexpected. They are very ready to remember that God can preserve their lives as long as he pleases, but they are extremely apt to forget that he has an appointed time to put a period to their lives. And if they do sometimes reflect that he has such an appointed time, yet they never know when that time will come. If they are in health, they hope and expect God will continue to preserve it. If they are sick, they hope and expect that God will remove their sickness, and still prolong their lives; and the

oftener he has graciously recovered them, the stronger are their hopes and expectations that he will recover them again and again, if they are sick. If God has saved them once or oftener from great and imminent dangers, they cherish stronger and stronger hopes of his preserving goodness; so that, in every situation, they forget God's appointed time, and put far away the evil day. Hence they imagine that they are always about to live, and never about to die; and of consequence, let death come when it may, it commonly comes unexpectedly both to the living and to the dying. If any disorder attacks the young or the old, they hope it will abate; but if it does not abate, they hope it will come to a crisis, and they shall recover, until a few days, or a few hours, before they actually expire. And their friends commonly entertain the same flattering hopes. So that in most instances persons die unexpectedly to themselves and others. The living generally desire and hope to have some previous warning of their approaching dissolution. But though God does give them premonitions and warnings of their appointed time, they will generally disregard or misconstrue such friendly admonitions, and prepare themselves and others for a grievous disappointment. As they know not God's appointed time, they are fond of appointing their own time of death; and their time is commonly far more distant than God's appointed time; but still they live and depend upon their own time, which is a most dangerous delusion, that has destroyed the souls of thousands. It is extreme folly in the young especially to depend upon long life, when they see and know that but a small proportion of mankind ever live to old age. They have much more ground to expect that God will not carry them even to old age, than that he will. Their depending upon life directly tends to prepare them for a great and fatal disappointment. And it is still more unwise and dangerous for the aged to hope and expect that they shall live much longer. They know that their appointed time cannot be far distant, whether their constitution be strong or feeble, or whether their health continues or declines. They have no time to lose, but need to employ it as good old Barzillai did his, in preparing for a dying hour.

5. Since God can shorten or preserve life, just as he pleases, none can enjoy life without becoming truly religious. All their interests for time and eternity are suspended upon the sovereign will and appointment of God, who has determined the precise time of their probationary state, and concealed that time from them. They live on sparing and distinguishing mercy, and they know not when that distinguishing and forfeited mercy may fail. They are in a dangerous situation,

and there are continually objects and events occurring which they cannot avoid, and which silently and solemnly remind them of their dangerous and critical situation. Those, therefore, who are destitute of religion are all their life-time subject to bondage through fear of death. If they have health, they cannot enjoy it in peace. If they have friends, they cannot enjoy them in peace. If they have prosperity, they cannot enjoy it in peace. If they are in trouble, the uncertainty of life increases it. Indeed, there is no peace to the graceless; for they are not reconciled to the appointment of God, respecting the day of their death; and while they are unreconciled to this, there is nothing in the universe that can give them solid comfort. Let God give them ever so many good things, this availeth them not, whenever they think of the appointed and unknown time of death, which will strip them of all they hold most desirable and valuable, and destroy all their future and eternal hopes. They can find no peace until they become at peace with God, and exercise that supreme love to him which will produce faith, repentance, submission, hope and confidence. These pure and holy affections constitute vital piety, which prepares all who possess it for peace and comfort in all conditions of life. But neither the young nor the old, neither the rich nor the poor, neither the prosperous nor the afflicted, can have peace, until they hope in God through grace. Godliness with contentment is great gain. No person can live comfortably without it. All the apparent peace and comfort, which the unholy, the unsubmissive, and the ungodly flatter themselves that they enjoy, is owing to nothing but stupidity and delusion, out of which they must sooner or later awake into remorse and despair. They stand on slippery places, and their feet will slide at God's appointed time. It is presumption in them to expect that God will give them warning long enough beforehand to prepare for death, or that he will cause them to take warning and prepare for the solemn event. They have much more reason to fear that God will cut off their lives suddenly and unexpectedly, and hurry them into eternity.

Finally, since God always brings about every one's death at the appointed and best time, mourners always have reason to exercise cordial and unreserved submission to his bereaving hand. He does not afflict willingly, or unwisely, or prematurely. He fixes the time of every death in a full view of all its antecedents, attendants and consequences. He regards with an equal and impartial eye both the dying and the living. He is never absent from the dying at the moment they expire. He is never an unconcerned spectator. He feels compassion towards them that weep, though he does not weep with them.

He not only does right, but he does well, with respect to both the dead and the living. Why then should the living ever murmur or complain? They ought to be thankful that God spared the dead so long, and that he has spared them still longer. In sparing their lives, he has bestowed a good upon them, greater than the evil he has inflicted by his bereaving hand.

Those who have recently lost a son, or a daughter, or a brother, ought to be still, and not open their mouths; for God has done it, and done it in perfect wisdom and goodness. It is true that they all have reason to mourn, but especially those who have been bereaved of a brother in the morning of life. The death of a young man of an amiable disposition, of respectable talents, of a reputable profession, and of a regular life, is a just cause of mourning and regret, not only to his nearest relatives but to all his friends and acquaintance. But neither a brother nor sister have any right to say, Lord, hadst thou been present, my brother had not died. God was present, and has done his pleasure, which is a solid ground, not only of submission, but of consolation. And if they only improve this bereavement aright, they will have reason to say, and be disposed to say, that it has been good for them that they have been afflicted and bereaved.

And now the death of Dr. KINGSBURY solemnly admonishes those of his age to be ready also. He was born and brought up with them, and shared in their esteem and regard, and was as likely, to human appearance, to live, as they were when he died, or are now. You have a demonstration that you are the monuments of God's sparing mercy; and will you not devote your spared lives to the service of your kind Creator and Preserver? Boast not of to-morrow. Another year, or another month, or even another week, may close your eyes in death. "Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation."

# SERMON XVIII.

## A WARNING TO YOUTH.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. — Eccl. xi. 9.

Youths have often been compared to trees in their bloom; but, like beautiful and promising blossoms, they often disappoint the hopes they inspire. It depends upon the principles they imbibe, and the courses they pursue, whether they shall or shall not be blessings to their parents, to their friends, and to their fellow creatures. Those who have lived to acquire the wisdom of piety and experience, have always felt a tender solicitude for the rising generation, and endeavored to guide and guard them in their young and inexperienced age. Solomon possessed all the wisdom which piety and experience could teach. He knew what it was to remember his Creator in the days of his youth, and to pour out his heart before him in prayer and praise. And he knew by experience the evil and folly of walking in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes. This excited in his breast a peculiar concern for those who were coming upon the stage of life, and were about to be exposed to all the dangers of this smiling and ensnaring world. His paternal feelings for the safety and happiness of the young, he expresses in terms the best adapted to make a strong and deep impression on their minds. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." I propose in the present discourse,

I. To give the true import of this serious address to youth; and,

II. To endeavor to convince them of the propriety of it.

I. The first thing to be considered is, the true import of the address to youth in the text. It has often been understood and represented in a sense very different from the wise man's meaning. For,

1. Some suppose that Solomon means to express his approbation of young people, in pursuing the innocent recreations and amusements of life. They consider him as representing religion as not only free from austerity and gloominess, but as productive of the purest happiness in the present, as well as in the future state. And it must be allowed that he often does paint virtue and piety in this amiable and beautiful form. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and to drink and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun." "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." The truth of these observations has been experienced by those who have lived a holy, devout and heavenly life. They have found that the enjoyments of religion lay the best foundation for the true enjoyment of the world. The good man is satisfied of himself, and prepared to receive, to improve, and to enjoy, every temporal blessing in the best manner possible. But yet,

2. This does not appear to be Solomon's meaning in the text, when he says, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." We can hardly suppose that he here addresses a pious youth, whose heart is right with God, and who loves to walk in the ways of his commandments; but the very terms he uses, denote that he is speaking to a careless, secure, unsanctified youth, who has no fear of God before his eyes. And surely he would not exhort such an one "to walk in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes." It is therefore beyond a doubt that he means to speak ironically, and to convey an idea directly contrary to what his words literally express. The inspired writers often use this mode of speaking, in order to convey their real meaning in the most strong and pointed manner. Thus God said of Adam, after he had been guilty of the folly as well as sin of disobedience, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." And Christ said to the obdurate Jews, "Fill ye up the measure of your fathers." Instead of

exhorting young people to gratify their corrupt and vain hearts, Solomon means to warn them against every evil and false way. This appears from what he immediately subjoins. "But know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart and put away evil from thy flesh; for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." It is presumed that every one will now admit that Solomon means, by his address to youth in the text, to remind them of their responsibility to God for all their conduct through life; and to fasten on their minds a strong and constant sense of that great and decisive day, when God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. But now those who are in the morning of life may be ready to ask, Why should the wise man give us, in particular, such a solemn warning to live and act under a realizing view of the great and last day? Did he not know that such a view of future and eternal realities would disturb our peace and destroy all our pleasing hopes and prospects? Why did he not make this address to the aged, who have gone through the busy scenes of life, and are just ready to appear before the supreme tribunal of their final judge? We do not see the propriety of his solemn address to us, in particular. Now, as I proposed,

II. To convince you, who are ready to think, to feel and speak in this manner, of the propriety of the wise man's address, and of the importance of your living in a constant preparation for your future and final account, I will suggest the following things to your most serious consideration.

1. Please to reflect upon your hearts, which you have carried about with you, and which you have found to be extremely corrupt and sinful. You were shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin. You came into the world with hearts deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Every imagination of the thoughts of your hearts has been evil, only evil, continually. In you, that is, in your hearts, there has dwelt no good thing. And your hearts have not only been full of evil, but fully set in you to do evil. Have you not found that they have led you astray in a thousand instances? Have they not led you to be ungrateful, undutiful, and disobedient to your parents? Have they not led you to hate instruction, and despise reproof; to disobey the voice of your teachers, and disregard those who instructed you? Have they not led you to speak many vain and idle words, if not to take the name of the Lord your God

in vain? Have they not led you to pursue vain amusements and sinful diversions? Have they not led you to neglect reading the Bible and pious books, and to omit secret prayer, and private and public worship? Have they not led you to profane the Sabbath, and to run into almost all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly? Have they not led you to love vain conversation, vain company, and to entice others to follow your pernicious example? Have you not found your hearts opposed to God, to the friends of God, to the cause of God, and to every thing serious, sacred and divine? Have you not felt a strong disposition to put far away the evil day, and to banish, as much as possible, all serious thoughts and objects from your minds? But instead of pushing these inquiries any farther, it may be more pertinent to ask, whither will such corrupt and depraved hearts carry you? Can you conceive of any safety in trusting in such hearts, which you have found have so often betrayed, deceived, and well-nigh ruined you? Can you set any bounds to your progress in sinning? Is there any evil, or danger, to which you are not exposed? Is there not, then, a great propriety in the wise man's addressing you in particular; and in warning you not to walk in the ways of your hearts, which are the ways to certain and endless ruin?

2. Consider that the world in which you live, and through which you have to pass to your long home, is every way calculated to corrupt and destroy you.

In the first place, the things of the world are full of poison, and perfectly suited to increase and draw forth the native corruption of your hearts. Every object which strikes your eye, or your ear, directly tends to affect your hearts, and leave a bad impression there. All the natural good and evil you experience, serves to awaken some sinful and selfish affection. All the objects around you are armed against you, and act an unfriendly part towards you. The regular succession of the seasons, the sudden and unexpected changes of fortune, the riches, the honors, and all the scenes of prosperity, which attract your desires and hopes, as well as all the evils you feel, or fear, concur to rivet your attention and attachment to some vain and unsatisfactory object. You cannot observe, much less mix with, the passing scenes of life, without being some way or other affected and corrupted by them. All the visible and sensible objects with which you are concerned and connected, have a direct and powerful tendency to blind your minds, harden your hearts, and unfit you for heaven.

In the next place, worldly employments, as well as worldly objects, are of a dangerous and ensnaring nature to your hearts.

God made you for activity, and has given you the best opportunities in this world, to exert and display all your active powers. You ought to be constantly engaged in some useful employment. But whether you cultivate the earth, or sail the ocean, or instruct others, or whatever business you pursue, your appropriate calling will engross your attention, and draw your hearts to some selfish interest. Any worldly business will tend to make you worldly-minded, and unfit you for the service and enjoyment of God. Every business, calling, or profession, has its peculiar evils and dangers, and naturally creates some custom, or habit, unfavorable to the concerns of the soul, while you retain your native depravity. You may imagine that if you avoid the more public and busy scenes of life, and seek retirement, you shall escape the dangers to which you see so many exposed; but your fond hope may involve you in the most insensible, and consequently in the most fatal evils; and that very business, which you expect will be your safety, may insensibly prove your ruin.

Besides, you are in no less danger from the men of the world, than from its business and objects. You are rising up with a rising generation, with whom you must live, and with whom you must converse, and with whom you must be more or less intimately connected. These children of disobedience will wish and endeavor to make you feel and act like themselves; and their weight and influence will be next to irresistible. This you have lived long enough to know by experience. How often have they already led you to think and speak and act contrary to the instructions you have received, the resolutions you have formed, and the plain dictates of your reason and conscience? If you turn to your right hand or left, if you associate with these or those of your age, they will lie in wait to deceive and destroy. Idle, vain, and wicked company is one of the most fatal snares to which you are exposed, and from which it is most difficult to escape. Old company may be as corrupting as the young, and sometimes far more fatal. Those who are grown gray in folly, vanity, and dissipation, are the most dangerous men in the world to those youths who, of choice or necessity, associate with them. This world lies in wickedness; and you cannot escape its contaminating influence, while you live in it with unholy hearts. Remember therefore your Saviour's caution: "Beware of men."

Farthermore, the god of the world unites with the men of the world, and all its scenes and objects, to lead you in the broad road to ruin. The apostle says, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the

glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." And he asserts that "the prince of the power of the air is the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." While your hearts remain unsanctified, Satan has an uncontrolled influence over you, and employs every thing in the world to blind your minds, to stupify your consciences, and alienate your hearts from God and divine things. He is a subtile and malignant enemy. He goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. While you are ignorant of his devices, he has every advantage to lead you captive at his will. Thus all the objects, all the employments, all the men, and the god of this world, are united in their influence to destroy you. You are constantly surrounded by powerful spiritual enemies, and through hosts of these you are passing through life. Do you not need and ought you not to receive the admonition in the text; and all other friendly admonitions of danger? Can any thought be more proper to lie continually on your minds, than your constant exposedness to live and die impenitent.

3. Bear it in your minds, that you are now in a state of trial, and forming your characters for eternity. God is leading you through the snares and dangers of this world, as he did his people in the wilderness, to know what is in your hearts, and whether you will obey or disobey his commands. He knows what will most sensibly affect every individual in every situation of life. He may try you with health of body and vigor of mind, with favor of friends and frowns of enemies, with the blessings of providence, with the means of grace, and with the strivings of his Spirit. He may place you in one situation, and then in another, to try your feelings under very different circumstances. And he will keep his eye constantly fixed upon you. He will watch you when you go out, and when you come in; when you are idle, and when you are busy; when you rejoice, and when you mourn; when you hope, and when you fear; when you regard, and when you disregard, his solemn warnings and admonitions. So that you will live and move under the constant inspection of the all-seeing and heart-searching God, who will be continually exhibiting before you new and various objects, on purpose to try your hearts, and prepare you for your future and eternal state. And can you conceive of being placed in a more serious, critical and trying situation? Though you are thoughtless of God, he will not be thoughtless of you; though you would have nothing to do with God, he will have something to do with you; and though you wish to flee out of his hand, his hand will hold you. He knows your down-sitting and

up-rising, and understands your thoughts afar off. He compasses your path, and surrounds you with his presence, every day, and every where. Do you not, then, need to be reminded repeatedly of your trying situation as probationers for eternity, who are preparing for your final and endless destination?

4. Remember that God not only may, but must call you to an account for all your conduct in this state of trial. He has formed you rational and immortal creatures. He has made you capable of knowing good and evil, and of feeling your moral obligations to obey all the intimations of his will, whether by the voice of his word, or by the dictates of your conscience. And since he has endued you with rational and moral powers, he cannot consistently leave you to live as you please; but is bound, by his moral perfections, to call you to an account for all the exercises of your hearts, and actions of your lives. "Know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment." God was at liberty whether to give you a rational and immortal existence or not; but we cannot conceive that he is at the same liberty to call you or not call you to an account for your treatment of him and one another in this world. It is just as certain, therefore, that he will bring you into judgment, as that he has brought you into existence. And now consider once more,

5. Whether your hearts can endure, or your hands be strong, in the day that God shall deal with you? When he calls you to judgment, he will bring into view all that you have said and thought and done, which was contrary to his holy law. He will let no idle word, no sinful thought, pass unnoticed. He will exhibit your whole hearts and your whole lives before the view of the whole intelligent creation. And is it not of serious importance that you should be prepared for this solemn scene? The judgment which God shall pass will be final, and without appeal. When Christ says to the righteous, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," they will go away into everlasting life. And when he says to the wicked, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," they will immediately sink into endless perdition. In the view of all these things, which have been exhibited to your most serious consideration, must you not see and feel the propriety and importance of the solemn address made to unthinking, unholy, unfeeling youth in the text, and of the solemn warnings and admonitions given to the young through the whole word of God? If solemn warnings will ever do you any good, it is most likely they will do you good in the morning of life. If they do not carry conviction to your consciences now, you have great reason to fear that they never

will. The longer you resist conviction, the more hardened you will grow, and the more you will be prepared to be destroyed; and that without remedy.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If there be a propriety in the solemn and pathetic address to youth in the text, then it is very absurd for any to think that young people in particular may be excused for postponing and neglecting preparation for their future and eternal state. This they are disposed to think and say. They claim a right to rejoice in their youth, to walk in the ways of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes, and put far away the evil day of death, or old age. They feel and say it would be very improper, indecent and unbecoming in them, to regard serious and divine things; and the world would despise them for it. They vainly imagine, that they have time enough before them to prepare for death and eternity in some later period of life. They are ready to believe and say that the aged, the sick and dying, ought to prepare for the solemn scenes before them. They would think it very absurd and criminal for a dying youth not to pray, and if capable, not to read the Bible, and, if he had opportunity, not to converse about death and eternity. They do think it is very absurd and criminal for those whose heads are covered with gray hairs, and who are stooping over the grave, not to read and pray, and set their souls in order for that vast eternity, where they must soon be fixed in never-ending happiness, or misery. But yet, they excuse themselves for the neglect of every religious duty, and for the ardent pursuit of every lying vanity. And their excuse is accepted by one another, by the world in general, and too often by their very parents, who have publicly and solemnly dedicated them to God, and bound themselves to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This would be strange were it not common; and that it is common is stranger still. Such views and feelings are contrary to the voice of God in his word. He requires young people to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and commands young men to be sober-minded. Such views and feelings are contrary to the voice of God in his providence. He sends death to the young as well as to the old. And such views and feelings are contrary to the dictates of conscience in both the old and young. They both know that it is the indispensable duty of rational and immortal creatures to give their hearts and lives to God, as soon as they are capable of it. There are in reality more and weightier reasons for youth to be religious, than for any other persons.

While they neglect religion, they run the awful risk of destroying, not only their own souls, but the souls of others, and of doing a vast deal of mischief in the world, whether they are finally saved or lost.

2. If there be a propriety in the solemn and pathetic address to youth in the text, then there is something very beautiful and amiable in becoming religious early in life. Piety adorns all persons who possess it; but it shines with peculiar lustre in youth, because it more clearly appears to be the effect of a change of heart, than of a change of circumstances. Gay youths often become more sober, circumspect and regular, in consequence of age, of trials, and even of ambition, or a desire of gaining respectability in the eyes of the world; while they are as really impenitent, unbelieving and opposed to the gospel, as ever they were. But when young men become sober-minded, and renounce the vanities of childhood and youth, and unite with the people of God in practicing and promoting vital piety, they exhibit a shining evidence of real, unfeigned religion, and of a pure purpose to serve God and their generation as long as they live. They resemble young Samuel, young Josiah, and the young Redeemer, who went about his Father's business at twelve years old. Though some, who were converted late in life, have been eminently pious and extensively useful, yet those who have been the most pious and most useful in the world, have generally become pious in youth. Such certainly have the most time and best opportunities of doing good in the world. How useful were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; how useful were Joseph and Moses; how useful were Jehoiada and Daniel! These men were early pious, and long and extensively useful; and they will command the respect and veneration of all mankind to the end of time. Early piety is so far from being really disreputable, that it never fails to command the inward respect of both the young and the old. Early piety is peculiarly pleasing to God. He says, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early, shall find me." Accordingly, as far as our observation extends, we find that God much oftener produces piety in the young, than in the old. Though some old Manassehs are called in at the eleventh hour, yet the instances are very few, in comparison with the conversion of youths and others in the early stages of life. Youth is the best and most important time to become religious. It is the best time for themselves, for God, and for the world, were they sure of life and of a sound conversion in the hour of death. But they have no assurance of life, nor of becoming religious, though life should be prolonged to the latest period. Those youths, and those only, have acted the wisest part, who have

chosen the one thing needful, devoted themselves to God, and secured his everlasting favor.

3. If there be a propriety in the solemn and pathetic address to the youth in the text; then there is a peculiar propriety in young persons remembering the Sabbath-day, and keeping it holy. The Sabbath was made for man, and is a precious season given to the young as well as the old, to attend to the great concerns of their souls. It is a time to think, to read and to pray, in secret and private, as well as in public. But young people are extremely apt to neglect and even abuse the great privilege of attending public worship, and hearing the gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light, opens the invisible scenes of the invisible world, and exhibits the restraining motives of death, judgment and eternity. The gospel assures them, that they are living for eternity, and that their souls are immortal, and that they must very soon be called into judgment, and give an account of the deeds done in the body. But who are so apt to neglect and abuse the privileges of the Sabbath as they are? Who are so apt to absent themselves from the house of God? Who are so apt to attend public worship with levity? Who are so apt to resist the truth and despise reproof? Yet none, in God's view, stand in so much need of instruction, of warning and of reproof, as they do. He has commanded parents to instruct and restrain them; and he has commanded his ministers to feed the lambs of his flock. It is to be greatly lamented, that parents so often allow their children to neglect public worship, while they attend it. In seasons the most difficult to attend public worship, we often find the seats of the young vacant, while the seats of the aged are filled. The rising generation here are most criminally negligent in attending public worship, and far more criminal still, in profaning the Sabbath in every way in which it can be profaned. The abuse of the Sabbath is the most soul-ruining sin of youth. It has brought thousands to an untimely end. "Wo unto you that laugh now: for ye shall mourn and weep." Solomon represents a self-ruined and self-condemned youth as saying to himself, "How have I hated instruction and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me; I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." Every youth who profanes the Sabbath, rejects the gospel, and despises reproof, is in danger of enduring such bitter reflections to all eternity.

4. If it be proper to give young people such solemn warnings and admonitions as Solomon does in the text, then it must be extremely improper to provide for them and allow them in

vain and sinful amusements. If one of these things is right, then the other is wrong. If it be right to teach youth that their hearts are totally depraved, that they live in an evil and dangerous world, that they are already under a sentence of condemnation and the wrath of God abideth upon them; that they are exposed every day to sickness and death, that death will close their probationary state, and that after death is the judgment; can it be right to provide superb theatres and elegant ball-rooms, at a great expense, for their entertainments and vain amusements? All parents know that if one of these things is right, the other must be wrong. And I presume no parents can be found, who do both. Those who teach, warn and reprove their children, to make them sober-minded, never provide for them nor allow them in vain and dissipating amusements. And those parents who provide for and allow their children to spend their time in vanity and fashionable amusements, do not desire nor dare to inculcate upon them the vast importance of preparing for death, judgment and eternity. Let me now seriously ask all parents, which of the two modes of treating children is right? Will you not answer as one, it is right to instruct, to warn and admonish your children to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and to abstain from all lying vanities? If you say and believe this, can you conscientiously allow them to go into vain company, and to join in their vain and dissipating amusements? You must be called to an account for your conduct towards your children, as well as they for their conduct towards their Creator. Dare you do that which you know will tend to prevent rather than promote the piety and salvation of your children? Think for a moment how you would feel to see one of your children in the bloom of youth, lying on a death-bed, expecting every day to be called into judgment, without hope; would you not bitterly lament your negligence in not preparing him for heaven? If you would, how should you treat your children in health? This is no imaginary case. It is somewhere or other realized almost every day. I am not preaching terror. I am only preaching truth, and such truth as I have often preached.

5. It appears in the view of this subject, that the death of young people is a very solemn and interesting event to the living, whether they leave the world prepared or unprepared. Death is always a solemn and interesting event to the dying, let it come how or when it will. For it closes their state of probation, seals up their account for the great day, and transmits their souls to their long home. But when men gradually sink into the grave under the infirmities and weight of old age, their departure out of the world is generally little noticed and

less regretted, by the living. They have been expecting their death, and preparing their minds for the event. It gives them but a little shock. They feel very differently, however, when the young are prematurely called out of the world, in the midst of high hopes and promising prospects. They feel both for the dying and for themselves. When the aged are languishing under the decays of nature, instead of pitying we congratulate them in the prospect of the speedy termination of all their pains and sorrows. But the prospect of the blasted hopes and expectations of languishing and dying youths, extorts pity from every breast. To leave the world just as they have come upon the stage of life, looks like an awful disappointment to themselves. And it is certainly so to others, who naturally place dependence upon the lives and usefulness of the young.

The late instance of mortality in this place is, therefore, in every respect, a very solemn and instructive event to the living. A youth's going to the dead, is like a youth's coming from the dead, to warn the living to prepare for eternity. Whether the deceased was prepared or unprepared, to leave the world, we have no right to decide. This instance of early death admonishes the aged of their obligations of gratitude to God for prolonging their lives in this dying world. They might have been cut down as early in life; and it has been owing to the distinguishing mercy of God that they have been preserved alive, amidst ten thousand dangers and accidents, and allowed so much time and so many opportunities and advantages of doing and getting good, and of preparing for a blessed immortality beyond the grave. God has done much more for them, than he did for the poor youth that has gone the way of all the earth. And he expects that they should be more ripened for a later and more joyful departure out of the world. The death of this youth speaks directly and solemnly to those who are greatly disappointed, and sorely bereaved, by her premature decease. Their minds have been painfully agitated by alternate hopes and fears, while they saw her languishing from month to month, from week to week, and from day to day, till she died. Their expectations are now completely blasted, and what they feared is come upon them. She is taken and they are left; and they are left, to prepare to follow her who will never return to them. Their fiery trial now speaks louder than words, and imperiously calls upon them to be still, and know that the Judge of all the earth has done right. They ought not to forget nor despise the chastening of the Lord; but they ought cheerfully to submit to his corrections, which, though grievous, may eventually afford them just cause of gratitude and praise. The death of youths has often been blest for the eternal benefit

of the living. The mourners, on this occasion, are under peculiar obligation to hear the rod, and him who has appointed it. God has thrown them into the furnace of affliction, which must have its effect, and a lasting effect, whether they are sensible of it or not. But it is to be hoped that the youth most deeply interested and affected, will from this day forward remember his Creator. And what I say to him, I say to all the youth in this place. The last year, God took the aged, and spared the youth; and he is still sparing them. But what has been the consequence of God's long suffering and patience towards you? Has it melted your hearts into gratitude and godly sorrow for the abuse of his mercy? Has it not rather stupified the hearts of all, and seared the consciences of many? Has childhood and youth ever produced more vanity than here, for years past? Have any children and youth, any where, become more stupid, hardened, profane, and obstinate in wickedness, than those who are now before me, and who have often heard my warning voice? How much soever I may have failed in the discharge of my ministerial office for forty-six years, I have not designedly been negligent in warning, admonishing, and reproving children and youth, as occasions have occurred. I have been so uniform and constant in this part of my duty, that both the young and the old have often anticipated reproofs, and taken pains either not to hear them, or resist them. And though they have so often and so long resisted, yet I do not regret the exertions I have made to awaken and convince and convert and restrain the children and youth. But whether I have met with the concurrence of others in my exertions so much as ought to have been afforded, I leave to the serious consideration and reflection of professing parents, and professing christians, and every one who regards the temporal and eternal good of the rising generation. But is there no hope? Most certainly there is. I can remember the time when some of the best christians now before me were vain and thoughtless youth. God arrested them in their career, changed their hearts, compelled them to come in and unite in building up his cause. The present children and youth are not beyond his reach. The voice from the dead and from the living, this day, may do what has not been done for years past. Though there is much ground to despair of veteran sinners, there is still ground to hope that God will raise up from the children and youth a generation to serve him, when we who are aged are laid in the dust.

# SERMON XIX.

## EVERY ONE DISPOSED TO THINK HIS AFFLICTIONS PECULIARLY SEVERE.

MAY 12, 1822.

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger. — LAMENTATIONS, i. 12.

MAN is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. The penal effects of the first apostacy have fallen upon the children of Adam in every age, and in every part of the world. Sin and sorrow have always been inseparably and universally connected. "In this shape, or in that, has God entailed the mother's throes on all of woman born, not more the children than sure heirs of pain." This *sinful*, has always been an *evil* world. As all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, so all have felt, in a greater or less degree, the tokens of the divine displeasure. God has wrung the hearts of millions and millions all over the world, with the keenest anguish and distress, by pains, sicknesses, and every species of afflictions and calamities. He has visited not only individuals with private, but whole kingdoms and nations with public calamities. He afflicted his own peculiar people with heavier calamities than he did any other nation in the world. These national calamities the prophet laments in the chapter which contains the text, though he represents the nation as one individual person. The reason of this was obvious. The national calamity was so great and so universal, that every individual had a large share in it, and every one could say, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord

hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Though every person was ready to acknowledge that the evil he suffered came from the hand of God, yet he was disposed to complain of the weight of his afflictions, which was very unreasonable. Hence we may draw this just conclusion:

That the afflicted are extremely apt to imagine that God afflicts them too severely. I shall,

I. Show that the afflicted are very apt to imagine that God afflicts them too severely. And,

II. Show that they never have any good reason to think so.

I. I am to show that the afflicted are very apt to imagine that God afflicts them too severely. There are a vast many minor evils, trials and troubles, which universally fall to the lot of the most happy and prosperous persons in the world, that ought not to be considered as real afflictions or sources of sorrow, and are perfectly consistent with a general state of joy. Accordingly we find the great majority of mankind commonly appear more joyful than sorrowful. It is only here and there, and now and then, that we find ourselves or others bowed down with sorrow and drowned in tears. The common and lower evils of life do not rise high enough to be called calamities, afflictions, or sorrows. But mankind in general, and especially those who have enjoyed long and uninterrupted prosperity, are extremely apt to magnify smaller evils into greater, and actually turn them into serious troubles and trials. There are many degrees and shades of difference in those evils which may be properly called afflictions. But those who suffer lighter troubles are very apt to let their imagination have its free scope, which can easily magnify light afflictions into great and heavy ones. So that mankind commonly afflict themselves more than God afflicts them. If God visits them with light afflictions, they are apt to think that they are much heavier than they are. They are so generally free from pain, that a little pain appears to be great. They are so used to enjoy prosperity, that a little adversity appears to be great. They are so habituated to pursue their designs without interruption, that a little interruption becomes a great and sore evil. They so generally attain the objects they pursue, that a few and small disappointments give them much trouble and affliction. And if they happen to notice the hand of God in their misfortunes, they are apt to think he chastises them too severely. They compare their former prosperity with their present adversity, and the contrast naturally magnifies their adversity in exact proportion to their past prosperity. Those who have been the most prosperous are generally the most impatient under any adversity, and feel it the most sensibly.

There is another way, by which the afflicted are apt to magnify their afflictions. They compare their present afflictions, not only with their past prosperity, but with the afflictions of others; which leads them to imagine that their afflictions are not only great, but singular, and such as nobody else has suffered; at least, to such a great degree. This appears to be the conduct and feeling of him who speaks in the text. "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!" He was comparing his afflictions with the afflictions of others, and his imagination led him to conclude that God had chastised him more severely than he ever chastised any other poor miserable object; which greatly swelled the sorrows of his heart. This is not a solitary instance of such imaginary sorrow. Job indulged his imagination to magnify his sorrow, though at first he exercised the most cheerful and unreserved submission. "Job answered and said, Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together. For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." At many other times Job seems to exert himself to exaggerate and magnify his sorrows and afflictions. David also often run into the same error, and uses the same hyperbolical language in lamenting his great and heavy trials. He says to God, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." The prophet in his lamentation employs the strongest language to exaggerate the evils God had inflicted upon him. "He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow." The afflicted naturally love to call up all the aggravating circumstances of their afflictions, and make themselves believe, that their sorrows are singular, and greater than have ever been endured by others. And under this impression, they imagine they have a right to call for universal pity and compassion. This seems to have been the opinion and feeling of the prophet. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Job also indulged the same opinion and feeling, and expressed it in the same pathetic language. "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me." Every heart knows its own bitterness, and every person is partial in his own favor. As every afflicted person values his own happiness more than he ought to value it, so he considers every thing that destroys or dimin-

ishes his own happiness as a greater evil than it is, and a much greater evil than the same evil when it is inflicted upon others. And as he thinks there is no sorrow like unto his sorrow, so he as naturally imagines that his sorrow calls for greater pity and sympathy, than the sorrow of any other afflicted person. This is a common error of all the afflicted, though some may imbibe this error to a greater degree, and indulge it more freely, and manifest it more fully than others. There is such a vast variety in the nature, circumstances and duration of afflictions, that it is impossible to determine on whom God has inflicted the greatest natural evils or calamities; yet the afflicted are nevertheless almost universally disposed to imagine that they do bear, or have borne, the heaviest burdens, and experienced the deepest and most pungent and overwhelming sorrow. But as this must be a great and unhappy mistake, I now proceed,

II. To make it appear to be so. Here it may be observed,

1. That none that are afflicted ever know, that God lays his hand heavier upon them, than upon others. Though it be undoubtedly true, that God does lay his hand heavier on some than others; yet no one knows that his troubles, afflictions, and sorrows, are greater than some others suffer. God only knows how to weigh afflictions in an even balance; and he always does count the tears he causes, and weigh the sufferings he inflicts. He never strikes a lighter or heavier blow than he originally and eternally intended. He always dispenses good and evil to mankind in this world, in weight and measure according to his unerring wisdom, goodness, and justice. He knows how every person will feel under his smiles and frowns. He knows, that the same prosperity, or the same adversity, will not make the same impression on different persons. He knows beforehand what good to take away, or what evil to inflict, in order to give any person the greatest pain, sorrow, or affliction. But the afflicted never know this beforehand, in respect to themselves, or others; and therefore they never know whether their own afflictions are greater than those of others. They only know how heavy God lays his hand on themselves, but never know how heavy he lays his hand on others. Though they may think what they see others suffer is light, yet others may think what they see them suffer is light. Mankind are extremely apt to judge erroneously, concerning the nature and weight of their own afflictions, and the nature and weight of the afflictions which others around them suffer. They have a high estimation of the good which they see others enjoy, but a low estimation of the evil they suffer. And on the other hand, they cherish a low idea of their own prosperity, and a high idea of their own adversity. And this

erroneous comparison is one of the largest sources of impatience, discontent, sorrow, and affliction, all over the world, and leads individuals every where to imagine that God afflicts them too severely. None have any reason to imbibe and cherish this unjust and ungrateful opinion of the dealings of divine providence towards them, and to think hard of God for afflicting them too severely, because they imagine he afflicts them more severely than he afflicts others. For they do not and cannot know that this is true; but if it were true, it would be no just ground of complaint. God has a sovereign right to withhold good, or inflict evil, according to his own wise and holy pleasure.

2. The afflicted never have any reason to imagine that God afflicts them too severely, because he never afflicts them more than they know they deserve. Every person has sinned and come short of the glory of God. Every sin deserves punishment; and it belongs to God to inflict any punishment that sin deserves. Natural evil is the only proper punishment of moral evil, which is the primary source of all the pains, afflictions and sorrows, which have made this world a vale of tears. Though mankind are here in a state of probation, in which God does not mean to punish them according to the full demerit of their sins, yet he means, for wise and holy reasons, to chastise them for their disaffection and disobedience. All afflictions are real punishments and marks of the divine displeasure, which renders them so grievous to be borne. It was this that gave peculiar weight and pungency to the afflictions which the prophet laments in the text. "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." It was a sense of the divine displeasure which made the deepest and most painful impression upon the mind of the afflicted prophet. He was fully sensible that he and his nation had deserved all the afflictions and sorrows wherewith the Lord had afflicted them, by the tokens of his just displeasure. He felt that God had not punished them more, but less than they deserved. Accordingly, he says in the third chapter of his Lamentations, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." And under the same impression he asks, "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" No man in this world was ever afflicted or punished more than he deserved. What reason then have the afflicted to think or say that God has afflicted them too severely, when he has not afflicted them more, but less, than they deserved? The afflicted always have reason to feel and to say as Job did in the depth of his sorrows and

bereavements, "What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" If we did not deserve to be punished, the lightest afflictions would be severe; but since we deserve to be punished, the heaviest cannot be too heavy. The best men on earth are morally imperfect, and their moral imperfection is displeasing to God, who has a right to correct them for their sins, and he cannot correct them more severely than they deserve; which ought to silence all their murmurs and complaints under the chastising hand of God. This consideration led Micah to say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him; until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me." This feeling and language every one afflicted, whether lightly or heavily, ought to adopt.

3. The afflicted have no reason to think that God afflicts them too severely, because he never afflicts them more than they need to be afflicted. He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men. All men need afflictions and trials in this life, and it is only when need be, that God afflicts them and tries them, that they may know their own hearts, which it is highly important that they should know. Moses said to the children of Israel, "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or not." Again we read, "Thus said the Lord of hosts concerning his people, Behold, I will melt them, and try them: for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?" And again he says, "I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early." Peter says to those who had entertained a hope, "Though now for a season (if need be) ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." God knows when men need affliction, and what affliction they need; and he always sends proper afflictions at the proper seasons, to answer the wisest and best purposes. God afflicts some to draw forth the corruption of their hearts, and make them sensible that they are under the entire dominion of a carnal mind, which is opposed to his character, his law, his government, and the gospel of his grace, and of course exposed not only to his present, but his

future and everlasting displeasure. This is suited to alarm their fears, and excite them to flee from the wrath to come. God afflicts others to try their hearts, and draw forth their right affections, and give them sensible evidence of their having the spirit of adoption, and belonging to the number of his family and friends, and thereby removing their past painful doubts and fears. And he afflicts others, to give them an opportunity to display the beauties of holiness, by patience, submission, and cordial obedience in the darkest and most trying seasons. For this purpose principally, it seems, he tried Job and Abraham so severely. He never afflicts any person so often, or so long, or so much, as he might justly afflict him, but only so often, or so long, or so much, as he sees it proper and necessary to afflict him; and who can have any reason to complain of this? God always sees a need why he should afflict one person rather than another; why he should afflict him in one way, rather than in another; and why he should afflict him just so much, and no more. Though God very rarely informs the afflicted why they need to be afflicted, or why he does afflict them; yet they may often discover, either before, or at the time, or afterwards, that they actually needed to be afflicted at the very time, in the very manner, and to the very degree, God was pleased to afflict them. David discovered the need of his afflictions, and gratefully acknowledges the happy effects he derived from them. "It is," he says, "good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." God is as wise, and holy, and just, and good, in afflicting others, as he was in afflicting David. And if, instead of complaining that God afflicts them too severely, they would gratefully and submissively acknowledge that, in mercy, he has afflicted them less than they deserved, they would find peculiar benefit from his severest chastisements. It is unwise, as well as criminal, for any of mankind to complain that God afflicts them too severely, when he never afflicts them only in the time, and manner, and measure, in which they need to be afflicted. This all good men have always felt and acknowledged; and all others ought always to feel and acknowledge. I may add,

4. That the afflicted have no reason to think that God afflicts them too severely, because he never afflicts them any more than his glory requires him to afflict them. Though God has a subordinate regard to the character, and conduct, and state, and interest, of those whom he afflicts, yet he always has a supreme and ultimate regard to his own glory in all the dispensations of his providence towards the children of men.

This he has often and expressly declared in his word. How often does he tell us, that he will do or has done this, "that his name may be declared throughout all the earth!" And how much more frequently does he say, I will do this or that, "that ye may know that I am the Lord!" All the creatures and works of God are inseparably connected; and in governing one thing as well as another, and in disposing of one person as well as another, he has a supreme regard to his own glory, and the best good of the whole universe. Accordingly, he gives or takes away; he smiles or frowns; just as these great objects require. So that it is impossible for any creature in the universe to know whether he afflicts mankind too much or too little, because he gives no account of his matters, and only assures mankind that what they know not now they shall know hereafter. God always has as good reasons for frowning as for smiling; for taking away as for giving. This, Job believed; and it gave him complete satisfaction. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.' When God revealed to Abraham his purpose to destroy Sodom, he placed implicit and perfect confidence in the reasons and motives of the divine conduct, and said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The ways of God are inscrutable. None by searching can find out God. His judgments are a great deep, and his ways are past finding out. The incomprehensibility of the divine nature, and the absolute rectitude of the divine character, entirely forbid the afflicted to entertain the least thought that God afflicts them too severely, by denying them any favor, or by taking from them any blessing, or by inflicting upon them any evil. The attending angels (and perhaps every person has one) always see and admire the supremacy of God, and cordially approve of all the dispensations of his providence in the good he bestows, and in the evils he inflicts, upon mankind. They continually cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." They have seen all the awful judgments and calamities which God has sent upon whole nations and kingdoms, and all the personal trials, afflictions and sorrows with which he has visited individuals; but they have never seen any just cause for any of the sinful race of Adam to murmur or complain. God always reigns in righteousness, in wisdom, and in goodness; and never inflicts a single evil or calamity, or causes a single tear, without a wise and holy and proper regard to his own glory, and the highest holiness and happiness of the universe, which he is infinitely bound to promote, and which every one of his intelligent creatures ought to desire and pray that he would pro-

mote. If they ever complain, they complain when they ought to approve. If they ever murmur, they murmur when they ought to bless. They have always reason to believe that God treats them as well as infinite wisdom and goodness can treat them. They ought to feel as David did, when he said, "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it."

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said, that it is very unwise as well as criminal for the afflicted to brood over and aggravate the greatness of their affliction. There is universally a great propensity in the afflicted to brood over their trials and troubles, and indulge their imaginations in calling up and exaggerating all the gloomy and painful circumstances, not only of their present, but of their past scenes of sorrows and bereavements. They are naturally excited to do this, from two peculiar motives. One motive is, to move the pity and commiseration of others, to lighten the weight of their afflictions; and the other motive is, to enjoy the luxury of sorrow, or self-sympathy and compassion. These motives are plainly suggested by the plaintive language of the mourning prophet. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." He calls upon all to behold, to take notice of and commiserate, his forlorn condition, which he imagines would greatly alleviate his burden, and console his bleeding heart. And if none should regard him, but pass by him without notice or compassion, he seems determined to pity himself under the severe tokens of the divine displeasure, and so enjoy the luxury of sorrow blended with self-condolence and commiseration. This appears to have been precisely the language and feeling of Elijah in the day of darkness and despondency. He retired to a gloomy mountain and lodged in a solitary cave, to brood over his sorrows, and enjoy the pleasure and even luxury of bemoaning his wretched and forlorn condition, deprived of former friends and friendship, and sinking under a complication of insupportable trials and afflictions. And when God called to him with the voice of reproof, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" he replied, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets, and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." This was as much as to say, "There is no sorrow like unto my sorrow. The Lord whom I have so long and so zealously served, has afflicted me severely. My punishment is greater

than I can bear. And since there is no eye to see me, and no heart to pity me, I will pity myself, which is the only source of consolation I can find." God saw and condemned this unwise and criminal conduct of Elijah, and commanded him to renounce his undutiful, and ungrateful, and unsubmissive, views and feelings, and perform the important duty which he had for him to do. It is always owing to some selfish and sinful motive, that the afflicted brood over, and try to exaggerate, the evils they suffer. It is implicitly soliciting their fellow men to join with them in disapproving and condemning the divine conduct in chastising them so severely. It is feeling and acting like disobedient children, who desire to be pitied under the pains of just parental correction. It is endeavoring to lighten their burdens, by actually increasing their weight, and prolonging their duration. For the more they brood over their troubles, the deeper impression they make upon their minds. It is like opening wounds that time would heal, if they were not repeatedly opened afresh. It is acting like Zion in her affliction, when she sighed and went backward. Self-commiseration is self-gratification, and not self-denial, or true submission and resignation under the correcting hand of God.

2. If the afflicted have no reason to think hard of God, or indulge the feeling that he corrects them too severely, then as long as they do indulge such a thought and feeling, they can receive no benefit from the afflictions they suffer. God always has a wise and benevolent design in afflicting the children of men, and all the afflictions which he sends upon them, whether light or heavy, are calculated to do them good, and always will do them good, if they do not abuse them, but cordially submit to them. They may always receive benefit and comfort from them, if they do not refuse to be comforted. But they refuse to be comforted so long as they indulge the thought, that God afflicts them too severely, and endeavor to exaggerate their afflictions, and to complain of them, and allow themselves to sink and faint under them, and cherish a murmuring and desponding spirit. Such selfish, rebellious views and exercises are diametrically contrary to patience and cordial submission, and highly displeasing to God. It is inwardly contending with their Maker, and practically saying unto him, that they will not be reconciled to him, unless he will remove his hand, and grant them their selfish desires. There have been ten thousand instances of this kind. I will mention two striking cases. Because Naboth refused to let Ahab have his vineyard, he exaggerated and brooded over the evil, until he refused all consolation, and sunk down into a weak and groundless despondency, which totally prevented his exercising the least

submission to the hand of God concerned in the event. And because the king exalted Mordecai above Haman, it stung him to the heart, and destroyed all his happiness, to which he would not and could not submit. Though these two men put on the semblance of humiliation and submission, yet their hearts were perfectly and obstinately opposed to the least degree of cordial resignation. It is one thing for the afflicted to say that God has not afflicted them too severely, and quite another thing to be reconciled to his chastising hand. True submission never disposes the afflicted to think or feel that God lays his hand too heavy upon them, or to indulge gloomy and self-sympathizing thoughts; but directly tends to turn their attention from themselves to God, who has laid his hand upon them, and afflicted them far less than they know and feel they deserve. But scripture, observation and experience all teach us how prone we are to feel and act under afflictions as Ephraim did. God, who knew the heart, said, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning," that is, pitying, "himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." How often do the afflicted do as God says they do, feel and act like a wild bull in a net, and grow gloomy, sorrowful, melancholy, sullen, and obstinate, instead of bowing silently and cordially to divine sovereignty! They take the direct course to prevent submission; and to prevent any benefit, comfort or consolation coming to them from their afflictions. This must be extremely unwise, and displeasing to God, and forbid every gleam of hope that God will remove his hand or alleviate their sorrows, which they take pains to increase and prolong. But on the other hand, they have reason to fear that God will give them to that stupidity of conscience and hardness of heart, which will prove their ruin.

3. If the afflicted have no reason to think that God afflicts them too severely, then they always have reason to submit to him under his correcting hand. If they have no reason to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor to faint when they are rebuked of him, then they have every reason to bow down in silent and cordial submission under the heaviest, as well as lightest affliction. They must either submit, or murmur and repine; but we have seen plain and weighty reasons why they should submit to the severest tokens of the divine displeasure. God never chastises them only when they deserve and need to be chastised, and when his glory requires him to chastise them. He never strikes a heavier stroke than he intended to strike, or than his wisdom and goodness saw it necessary to strike. When he sees that light afflictions will answer his wise and benevolent purpose, he sends only such; and it is only when

he sees that such will not answer his wise and benevolent purpose, that he strikes with a heavier hand, and causes all his waves and billows to pass over those whose peculiar state of mind requires overwhelming sorrows. God displays more wisdom, more goodness, or I may say more self-denial, in visiting mankind with great trials and afflictions, than with small. For he does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men. They have more reason, therefore, to submit to heavy than to light trials or troubles. The more sensibly and painfully they feel the rod, the more submissively should they hear and submit to the voice of him who has appointed it. The weight of affliction is so far from being a just ground of complaint, that it is always a just ground of submission. This is no paradox. For as God has more and stronger reasons for inflicting great and heavy evils, calamities, and afflictions, than for inflicting lighter ones upon mankind, so they have more and stronger reasons for submitting to heavy, than to light corrections. Who will not say that a disobedient child has more reason to submit to a severe than to a light correction? The afflicted always reason absurdly, and act criminally, when they complain more bitterly and pathetically of great, than small evils and afflictions. Job and Jonah were inexcusable in imagining that they did well in complaining of God for the severity of their overwhelming calamities. God had weighty reasons for inflicting such weighty and extraordinary evils upon them, which were as weighty reasons for the most cordial and unreserved submission. Though mankind will allow the afflicted to express their pains and anguish under singular and extraordinary trials, yet they never fail of disapproving of their murmuring and complaining of divine severity, which is no just ground of complaint, but of silent and unreserved submission. If it be true that there is no sorrow like unto their sorrow, then it is equally true that none of the afflicted have reasons like unto their reasons to be silently and cordially resigned to the sorrow wherewith the Lord hath afflicted them in the day of his fierce anger. But they have never reason to think that there is no sorrow like unto their sorrow, since for aught they know, God has set multitudes as fairer marks, and caused his arrows to make deeper and more painful wounds in their hearts. Under every supposable affliction, the afflicted have no reason to complain, but every reason to submit.

4. It appears from what has been said, that men may derive more benefit from great, than from light afflictions. They are suited to make deeper and better impressions on the mind. They have a greater tendency to produce more serious reflections, more perfect patience, and more unreserved submission,

which are the happiest fruits of trials and afflictions. You have heard of the patience of Job, and of the benefit he derived from his afflictions. You have heard of the fiery trials of Abraham, and of the benefit he derived from them. You have heard of the great and numerous trials of the apostles and primitive christians, and of the peculiar benefits which they derived from the painful and self-denying scenes of tribulation through which they were called to pass. And you have heard of Manasseh, who long despised the chastenings of the Lord, but who at length was effectually taught his duty and the way to heaven, by the briars and thorns. Were the united voice of mankind to be heard upon this subject, they would be constrained to acknowledge that they had derived more benefit from adversity than from prosperity, and from heavy than from light afflictions. Though no affliction is for the present joyous, but grievous, yet it often afterwards produces the fruits of righteousness, joy, and gratitude. The greatest trials and troubles always produce the greatest good, unless the afflicted abuse them, and refuse to be benefitted and comforted. Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord in all, even the greatest, evils and sorrows wherewith he afflicts them.

5. It appears from what has been said, that it is as easy to submit to heavy as to light afflictions. As there are greater and stronger reasons to submit to heavy than to lighter evils, so these reasons render it more easy to submit to heavy than light afflictions. And what says experience in this case? Do not the lighter evils of life commonly produce more uneasiness, unhappiness, and internal murmurs and complaints, than more serious and affecting and interesting troubles? And are not mankind more disposed to justify their hard thoughts of God, for inflicting upon them light than heavy evils? In lighter evils they overlook the hand of God, and pay no attention to the need they have to be corrected, nor to the reasons he has to correct them. But when God more severely frowns upon them, and strikes them in more tender points, they cannot disregard or despise his chastening hand, but feel bound by plain and powerful reasons to submit. Submission becomes a case of conscience, whose dictates they dare not resist. Whenever, therefore, they plead the greatness, weight, or duration of their trials, as an excuse for not submitting, they plead what aggravates their murmurs and complaints. Their weighty sorrows are weighty reasons for immediate and cheerful submission. They have no reason to stand a moment to contend with their Maker, but a powerful reason to submit instantly. Job found it easier to submit instantly and without reserve, at the very

time his overwhelming evils fell upon him, than afterwards. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." God had taken away all, and he found it easier to give up all than to give up a part. Do you take away only one play-thing from a child, and he will complain more bitterly than if you take away all. And this holds true with respect to all the children of men. They find it harder to be stripped of one peculiar blessing than to be called to give up all. It is no less absurd than criminal for the afflicted to think that their afflictions are greater than they can bear, when they can easily and instantly cast them upon the Lord, who can ease them of their burden. So long as they do not submit, they take the burden upon themselves; but the moment they submit they cast it upon God. And when they have cast off a great burden, no matter how great, they feel themselves more at ease, than while they carry and refuse to cast off a light burden.

6. If men are apt to think that God afflicts them too severely, then their afflictions give them the best opportunity to know their own hearts. All afflictions are trials of the heart. They try whether the afflicted are stupid, or whether their hearts are hard, or whether their hearts are tender, or whether they have ever been broken and subdued, or whether they have declined and neglected to grow in grace. All descriptions of men have a fair opportunity, under great trials especially, to know what manner of spirit they are of. Such trials never fail to excite sensible motions and exercises of heart, which are the proper criterion to determine whether the heart is or has been right with God. Those who have always been stupid may discover their stupidity in a day of adversity. Those who have been awakened may discover the real effects of their awakenings in a day of adversity. Those who have been in doubt of their spiritual state may discover what it is, under heavy afflictions. Both growing and declining christians may discover their growing or declining state under the correcting hand of God, better than at any other time. It is easier to distinguish nature from grace, in the furnace of affliction, which is designed to separate the dross from the silver, than in a day of prosperity. Hence the apostle represents trials as matter of rejoicing. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice." As all men need to be tried, so all need to be afflicted, and to be afflicted in the very manner in which God afflicts them, in order to try them, and make them know their spiritual state. How often do we find that those who have

been long in doubt whether they have ever met with a saving change, have derived a comfortable hope in their adversity that they have experienced the grace of God! Their trials have enabled them to distinguish grace from nature, by causing them to exercise those christian graces, to which the promises of life are made. When pressed down with the weight of affliction, and drowned in sorrow, they have been drawn near to God, exercised love to his character, submission to his providence, and holy confidence in his promises. God often afflicts those who are in a dark and doubting state, to bring them out of darkness into light. Such persons in particular have peculiar need of fiery trials, and have peculiar reason to be thankful for them. And if they properly improve them, they will be thankful for them.

This subject calls upon all to inquire what effects they have derived from the afflictions which they have experienced. All have been more or less tried, and many, no doubt, imagine that they have been tried severely, and there have been no sorrows like unto their sorrows. All such remember their affliction and misery, the wormwood and the gall, and have their views and feelings still in remembrance. It behooves them to examine and distinguish their past views and exercises. They may afford a plain criterion to determine what they are now, whether in a state of nature or a state of grace; which is of the highest importance to themselves, to determine according to truth. Let those who know that they are in a state of nature, recall their past feelings under afflictions and divine corrections, that they may know how vile they are. Let those who have been depressed, and so bowed down as to resolve to seek and serve God, but have never fulfilled their resolution, reflect upon their peculiar guilt and danger. And let present mourners consider their critical and hazardous situation. You are now under trial, and under trial for eternity, and perhaps the heaviest if not the last trial you will ever have, before your day of trial will cease, and you are put into a state where trials can never do you any good. If you thought this would be the case, would it not alarm you? And do you not need to be alarmed? Do not all need to be alarmed? Deaths, sudden deaths, are frequently occurring. Let christians trim their lamps. Let sinners fly to the ark of safety. And let all stand in the posture of servants, waiting the coming of their Lord. He may come quickly and suddenly. And you know not what a day may bring forth. You are walking on the brink of time and verge of eternity. O that you would be wise, that you would consider your latter end!

# SERMON XX.

## DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IN THE DEATH OF MEN.

JUNE 9, 1822. DEATH OF ALEXANDER M. FISHER, PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY IN YALE COLLEGE.

I TELL you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left."—LUKE, xvii. 34.

EVER since God passed the sentence of mortality upon mankind, he has acted as a sovereign in carrying that sentence into execution. He has spared one and taken another, just as he pleased. Our Saviour said that God would act in the same sovereign manner, when he should lay Jerusalem and the temple in ruins. As he preserved Noah, while he sunk the rest of mankind in the merciless waves, and as he preserved Lot, while he consumed Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven, so Christ says he would preserve one and destroy another, under the same circumstances, when he should bring desolation on his own city, his own temple, and his own nation. "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left." God has a right to take one in a burning house, and leave another, and to take one in a sinking ship, and leave another; and he has done this in ten thousand instances. This then is the solemn truth which now lies before us,

That God acts as a sovereign in taking away the lives of men. I shall show,

I. What is implied in God's acting as a sovereign.

II. In what respects he acts as a sovereign in taking away the lives of men. And,

III. Why he acts as a sovereign in this interesting case.

I. We are to consider what is to be understood by God's

acting as a sovereign. It is very necessary that we should have clear and just ideas of divine sovereignty, which is often misunderstood and misrepresented. The sovereignty of God does not imply that he ever acts contrary to reason. To act contrary to reason is to act arbitrarily. Earthly sovereigns often act contrary to reason; and when they do, mankind justly think they have ground to complain of their unreasonable and arbitrary conduct. And were it possible that God should act contrary to reason, they would have the same ground to complain of his unreasonable conduct. But the only wise God never does act contrary to reason. He not only has some reason, but he has the very best reason, for his conduct. He knows the various relations which he bears to his creatures, and the various relations which they bear to him, and to one another. And though he acts as sovereign, yet he always acts agreeably to these relations, which afford the best reasons for every thing he does. Nor does his acting as a sovereign imply that he ever acts contrary to moral rectitude. It is morally impossible that he should falsify his word, or break his promise, or justify the wicked, or condemn the just, or do the least injury to any rational or irrational creature. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" But his acting as a sovereign does imply,

1. That he always acts after the counsel of his own will, without consulting the will, or pleasure, or counsel, of any other being. He formed all his own designs from eternity, and he never condescends to alter them, in compliance with the wishes, desires or counsel of any of his intelligent creatures. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him, and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" God knows that all his creatures are imperfect in wisdom, and incapable of giving him any counsel or advice; and he knows that many of them are imperfect in goodness, and have desires and wishes which he ought not to gratify. Hence he always acts according to his own pleasure, without paying the least regard to the will or pleasure of his creatures, any farther than their will, and pleasure, and designs, coincide with his own.

2. His acting as a sovereign implies that he always acts, not only without the counsel, but without the control, of any created beings. He is able to carry his own designs into execution, and always does carry them into execution, notwithstanding all the efforts of any of his creatures to constrain or restrain

his operations. It is in vain for any to say unto him, "What doest thou?" or to attempt to stay his mighty hand. He claims an absolute right to accomplish his own purposes. "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me: declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." The sovereignty of God necessarily implies that he acts independently of all his creatures; and instead of being controlled by them, he controls all their views, desires, and designs, according to his own pleasure. His sovereignty, therefore, is a holy and amiable sovereignty. It consists in his acting in the most just, most wise, most benevolent, and independent manner. I now proceed to show,

II. In what respects he acts as a sovereign in taking away the lives of men. Here it may be observed,

1. That he acts as a sovereign in respect to appointing the time of every one's death. Job acknowledges his sovereignty in this respect. "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." God has fixed the bounds of every human life, and determined to a moment when every one that comes into the world shall go out of it. And his appointment of the day of death is absolutely sovereign and universal. He determines that one shall die in infancy, another in childhood, another in youth, another in manhood, another in the meridian of his days, another in the decline of life, and another in old age. He has taken away thousands and thousands of the human race in every period of life. He has so determined the day of death as to baffle all human hopes, desires, and expectations. Though the time of death is deeply interesting to the living, yet God determines with absolute sovereignty when every one shall die. He carries the lives of all mankind in his holy and sovereign hand, and none can deliver themselves out of his hand. This warranted Solomon to say, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war." No human art or effort can prolong the life of a single individual beyond the bounds which God has, by an act of sovereignty, absolutely and irreversibly fixed.

2. God acts as a sovereign in determining not only the time, but the place of every one's death. This is a circumstance which often deeply affects both the living and the dying. Almost every person desires to die at home among his friends; and they as ardently desire to be with him, both for his sake and their own. There are many places, in which almost every

person would be extremely unwilling to breathe his last. But there is hardly any place to be found where some have not been constrained to die. God, who appoints the time, equally appoints the place of death, without regarding the hopes, or fears, or desires of those whom he takes, or of those whom he leaves. He arrests some at home, and some abroad; some on the road, and some in the field; some on the ocean, and some in foreign lands. No man knows, when he goes out of his house, that he shall ever come in again. There is no place in the world where men can be, or where they can go, but it may be the place where they must die. God can lead every person to the place where he has appointed his death and his grave; and no man can avoid dying at the place, any more than he can avoid dying at the time, God has appointed. If a man is to die at home, God will keep him at home. If a man is to die on land, God will keep him on land. If a man is to die on the ocean, God will carry him on the ocean, and there put a period to his life. Though mankind generally dread a watery grave, yet thousands have been buried in the mighty deep.

3. God acts as a sovereign in respect to the means of death. He employs a vast variety of means in bringing mankind to their appointed end. He brings some to the grave by means of the sword, the pestilence, and famine; some by means of storms and tempests; some by means of conflagrations, inundations, and earthquakes; some by acute and chronic diseases; and some by sudden and unexpected casualties or accidents. The visible and invisible means of death are innumerable; but they all produce their fatal effects, according to the original appointment and invisible agency of the Deity. If a man fly from an iron weapon, a bow of steel may strike him through. Though Ahab disguised himself to escape the arrows of death, yet a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel with a mortal wound. God can give a fatal energy to the most trifling causes. He can crush men before the moth. Unexpected sorrow, and even unexpected joy, has been the means of instantaneous death. The means of death lie in every path we tread; and God can employ them at any moment, to put a period to our lives; and while he preserves one, he may destroy another, pursuing the same path. He may preserve one, and destroy another, in the same bloody battle. He may preserve one, and destroy another, in the same dreadful tempest. He has ten thousand instruments of death, and he may employ which of them he sees fit, to put a period to the life of any person of any age, character or condition, in the most sovereign manner.

4. God acts as a sovereign in regard to the circumstances of death. He takes one, and leaves another, under the very same circumstances. He takes one healthy man, and leaves another. He takes one feeble man, and leaves another. He takes one rich man, and leaves another. He takes one poor man, and leaves another. He takes one fortunate man, and leaves another. He takes one learned man, and leaves another. He takes one great man, and leaves another. He takes one amiable, virtuous, useful, and promising man, and leaves another. Among the great, the wise, and the good, he takes one, and leaves another. Though men place dependence on their external circumstances, to secure them from the stroke of death, yet they afford them no security of life. For God acts as a sovereign, in respect to the circumstances of death. He commands death to enter the palaces of princes, as well as the cottages of peasants. He takes one, and leaves another, according to the order in which he has been pleased to place their names in death's commission; regardless of all exterior circumstances or distinctions.

5. God acts as a sovereign in calling men out of the world, whether they are willing or unwilling to leave it. Some men long to live, and dread to die. They have formed designs, which they ardently wish to live and accomplish; or they have bright and flattering prospects before them, which they wish to realize. But God often frustrates their designs, and disappoints their raised hopes and expectations, by a sudden and unforeseen death. On the other side, some who lie languishing under pains and misfortunes, long to leave the sorrows and sufferings of the present evil world, and to take refuge in the grave, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." But God takes one, and leaves another, of this description. Neither the desire nor the dread of death, prevent God from taking away any person, at his appointed time. He is continually disappointing the desires, the hopes, and the fears, of both the living and dying, by carrying into effect the sentence of mortality, which he has passed upon all mankind. I may add,

6. God displays his awful sovereignty, by calling men out of time into eternity, whether they are prepared or not prepared to go to their long home. He takes some away as soon as they are prepared to die, while he leaves others who are better prepared for death, to live and act a long while in the world, which causes them innumerable pains, trials and sorrows. And though he often waits long to be gracious to the unprepared, yet he never waits beyond their appointed time. When that period arrives, though they are ever so much unprepared,

he spares them no longer; but as the Psalmist says, drives them away in their wickedness. Neither a good nor evil character can divert the stroke of death. God will not suffer any to pass the bounds of life which he has determined. He will not regard the hopes or fears, the cries or prayers, of the dying or living, when his set time is come to call any from the stage of life and from the state of probation. In such a variety of important respects, God acts as a sovereign in disposing of the lives of men, which are so interesting and precious. It now remains to show,

III. Why God acts as a sovereign in this very important case. Several plain and pertinent reasons may be mentioned.

1. Because he has an independent right to act as a sovereign, in taking away the lives of men. He is the former of their bodies, and father of their spirits. In him they live, and move, and have their being. It is owing to his constant and powerful visitation, that they are preserved in life from day to day. They are his property, and he has a right to do what he will with his own. As he has in sovereignty given them life, so he may in sovereignty take it away whenever he sees cause, without assigning any reason for his conduct. He is under no obligation to consult the wills, or desires, or hopes, of any of mankind, whether he shall take one and leave another, when he has an absolute right to take all. Though men have some mutual claims upon the lives of one another, yet God's claims are paramount to all other claims. He has a higher claim to the life of a parent, than any child has; and a higher claim to the life of a child, than any parent has; and a higher claim to the lives of great and useful men, than the world have; and a higher claim to all the blessings of life, than the possessors have. There is nothing in the universe to bound or limit the sovereign right of God to take one and leave another of the children of men, whenever he pleases. As he is by nature an absolute sovereign, so it becomes him to display his sovereignty in disposing of the lives of men, upon which all their interests for time and eternity are suspended.

2. God acts as a sovereign in the article of death, because he only knows when and where to put a period to human life. Death is a most important event to every particular person, and not only to him, but to all intelligent creatures with whom he is connected, both in time and eternity. Indeed the whole intelligent universe is interested in, and will be affected by, the death of every infant, of every child, of every youth, as well as by the death of the greatest potentates on earth. Death, in every instance, fixes the immortal soul in a state of endless joy, or endless sorrow. And the eternal interests of precious and

immortal souls are too great for men or angels to dispose of. None but God is possessed of wisdom and goodness enough to dispose of his intelligent creatures in the wisest and best manner, through the interminable ages of eternity. And in order to take away the lives of men at the best time, by the best means, and under the best circumstances, God is obliged to act as a sovereign. If he should hearken to the wisdom or wills of creatures, he would commit ten thousand mistakes and errors, in respect to the proper persons to be taken away, and in respect to the proper time, and manner, and means of their removal from this to another world. And to make any mistake in the article of death might mar the glory of God and the good of the universe for ever. This God knows, and this is a weighty reason why he should shorten, as well as lengthen, the lives of men, after the counsel of his own wise, benevolent and immutable will. He always knows what the living and the dying will think and feel and say, when he takes one and leaves another; but he has a sovereign right to act contrary to what they may think and say and feel, in respect to his wise and holy conduct. He knew what David would think, and feel, and say, if he took away his beloved son Absalom; and he knew how Rachel would bitterly lament and bewail the loss of her children; but he paid no regard to such misguided feelings. Whenever he takes away any father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, he sees better reasons for taking them away, than any of their dear friends or connections can see for their being spared. And he certainly has a sovereign right to regard the general good more than the good of any individual.

3. Another reason, why God disposes of the lives of men as a sovereign, in all those respects which have been mentioned, is because he is under indispensable moral obligations to dispose of his own creatures in the wisest and best manner. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." This, with reverence, may be applied to God himself, as well as to any of his rational and accountable creatures. For he is under higher moral obligations to do right than any other being in the universe. When he sees it best to preserve any one's life, he is morally bound to protect him from every fatal sickness and mortal accident. But when he sees it best to take away any one's life, he is under equal moral obligation to take it away, whether he is willing or unwilling, and whether he is prepared or unprepared, for the solemn and interesting event. God's natural perfections lay him under infinite obligation to employ them in a sovereign manner to promote the highest good of the intellectual system, or according to his moral and

immutable rectitude. God is the supreme guardian of the lives and interests of all mankind; and he is morally obliged to dispose of their lives and interests in the wisest and best manner; and for this reason he is obliged to order the times, the means, and the circumstances of both their living and dying. There are undoubtedly many malignant beings conversant in this world, who would wish to lengthen the lives of some, and shorten the lives of others, beyond their appointed time. This renders it necessary that God should take the power of life and death out of the hands of all his creatures, and exercise that power himself in a sovereign and independent manner. He is infinitely more tender of the lives and happiness of men, than they are themselves; and therefore he could not answer it to himself, if he neglected to order every thing respecting the life and death of every person. So that we have always reasons to admire and adore the wisdom, the goodness, and the sovereignty of God, when he calls one or more out of time into eternity, while at the same time and under the same circumstances, he rescues one or more from the jaws of death. In all such cases, it becomes him to act as a wise, holy and sovereign God.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God acts as a sovereign in taking away the lives of men, then the aged have great reason of gratitude for the continuance of life. They have lived in the same world in which others lived, who were taken away in infancy, childhood, youth, manhood, and the decline of life. Thousands have fallen on their right hand and on their left. They have buried almost the whole world, and yet they are among the living to praise God. They have been exposed to innumerable diseases and accidents, which have proved fatal to others, and through the divine care and kindness they have been happily preserved. They have reason to say to God as David did, who in his old age was a wonder to himself as well as to others, "Thou hast kept mine eyes from tears, my feet from falling, and my soul from death." It is of the Lord's mercies that the aged are yet alive, who have never deserved to live, but have always deserved to die. God might have taken them and spared others, but he has taken others and spared them. What peculiar reason have they to be thankful for his undeserved and distinguishing goodness! And what peculiar obligations are they under to spend the residue of their lives in his service, and in a constant preparation for that great and solemn change which others have experienced, and which they must soon, at longest,

experience! They should feel and act like good old Barzillai, who renounced all the trifles, vanities, amusements, and minor concerns of life, that he might set his house and his soul in order, and be duly prepared to leave this, for a better world. And who will say that he did not act wisely? And who among the aged can excuse himself, if he refuses or neglects to follow his pious and dignified example? The hoary head is always a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

2. If God acts as a sovereign in taking away the lives of men, then they ought to maintain a constant and realizing sense that their lives are uncertain. God has designedly and graciously concealed from them every thing future. They never know the year, or the month, or the day, God has appointed to call them out of time into eternity. No place where they are, no circumstances they are under, no employments in which they are engaged, and no precautions which they or others can take, can secure them a day or moment from the stroke of death. If they are alive to-day, to-morrow they may be dead. They are dying creatures, and absolutely in the sovereign hand of Him who gave, and who has a right to take away life, whenever, and wherever, and however, he pleases. This God has frequently and solemnly forewarned them of, both in his word and in his providence. He says to every one, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Our Saviour forewarned men to stand in expectation of death, like servants waiting for the coming of their lord. He said, "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." He warned men against the forgetfulness of death, by the folly and fate of the man who said to his soul, Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry; to whom God said, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee. The apostle James says, "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? it is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall live, and do this or that." How often, not to say how constantly, is God enforcing these solemn warnings and admonitions in his word, by the dispensations of his providence! How often is he taking one and leaving another of the same age, and in the same circumstances! How often does he take the well before the sick, the strong before the weak, the useful before the useless, and the young before the old! Such signal acts of his sovereignty speak louder than words, and admonish

all the living to be ready also to go to the dead at the most sudden and unexpected call. They ought to acknowledge God in all their ways, that he may direct their paths, and crown all their labors, enterprises and pursuits with success. They ought to form every design, and undertake every business, with a deliberate proviso, "If we shall live, we will do this or that." But how often is this duty neglected! and what great and lasting evils may flow from it! O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider the uncertainty of life, and act under a realizing sense of it, in all their temporal and eternal concerns!

3. If God acts as a sovereign in taking away the lives of men, then they ought to avoid every mode of conduct which tends to stupify their minds, and create an insensibility to the uncertainty of life. Mankind are naturally averse from contemplating the shortness and uncertainty of life, and very reluctant to carry their thoughts into the invisible and eternal world. They love life and temporal ease and prosperity, and they have devised a vast many ways to banish from their minds future, invisible and eternal scenes and objects, which disturb their carnal peace and security. But all such ways ought to be constantly and resolutely shunned and avoided, because they have a fatal tendency to unfit every person both for living and for dying, and to expose them to lose their own souls. The uncertainty of life in the hand of a holy and sovereign God, is a proper criterion to determine the nature and tendency of the spirit, the customs and manners of the world. According to this criterion every thing must be wrong, and ought to be avoided, which tends to prevent or destroy a realizing sense of the uncertainty of life. Here then, let me ask, do not vain thoughts, and vain hopes of long life and prosperity, have this tendency? Do not cards, and balls, and parties, and idle conversation, have this tendency? Do not all set times for mere amusements and diversions, have this tendency? Do not idleness and prodigality of every species have this tendency? I appeal to both observation and experience on this subject. None will presume to say, that the spirit, the customs and manners of the world which have been mentioned, do not tend to stupify the mind, and exclude from it a realizing sense of the uncertainty of life and the reality of invisible and eternal objects. How then can any justify themselves in pursuing any mode of conduct which they know, both by experience and observation, tends to endanger their future and eternal interests? It is in vain for them to say, that they have a right to pursue this, or that, or the other, mode of conduct, which they know by experience and observation has a fatal tendency,

merely because every sinful mode of conduct is not expressly forbidden in the word of God. God requires them to show themselves men, and act agreeably to the infallible dictates of their own consciences, which forbid them to be conformed to this world, and require them to be conformed to the heart and the will of God. It is the pursuit of lying vanities that has the most general and fatal tendency to stupify the hearts and consciences of the young and the old, and to dispose them to put far away the evil day of death, till they are suddenly, and unexpectedly, and unpreparedly, hurried into eternity. Let all then be entreated, as they value their precious and immortal souls, to avoid every mode of thinking and acting, which tends to sink them into a state of stupidity and of fatal forgetfulness of their dying hour.

4. If God acts as a sovereign in taking away the lives of men, then it is not strange that he causes so many sudden and unexpected deaths. The unusual and extraordinary circumstances of death generally make a deeper impression on the minds of the living, than death itself, brought on by the decays of nature, and the more common causes of mortality. When one and another die by the infirmities of age, or by diseases and casualties which frequently prevail all over the world, we scarcely consider them as premonitions of the frailty and uncertainty of life. It is the design of God, therefore, to awaken men out of their stupidity, by more sudden and striking instances of mortality. When he would awaken a family, he sends a sudden death into it. When he would awaken a city, he sends the pestilence into it. When he would awaken the world, he sends desolating calamities among the nations of the earth. Hence says the prophet to God, "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Sudden and unexpected deaths are principally designed and calculated for the benefit of the living. It is sometimes for the good of the dying, to be called suddenly and instantaneously from the evils and sorrows of the present life into the abodes of the blessed; but much more commonly sudden deaths are designed for the spiritual benefit of the living. And they have often produced this desirable effect. But God never displays his amiable and awful sovereignty in a more visible and instructive manner, than when he takes one and leaves another, while thousands are falling together in a bloody battle; or when he takes one and leaves another, while numbers are sinking together in the mighty ocean. Who can describe or even conceive of the hopes and the fears, the anguish and distress, the cries, the prayers, and despair of those unhappy mortals who were lately sinking together in a watery

grave? Such instances of sudden and unexpected death, one would hope, God designed should make a deep, a lasting and salutary impression on many of the living. But,

5. It appears from what has been said, that there is a solid foundation for the most cordial and unreserved submission under the heaviest bereavements. They come from the hand and heart of a holy, wise, and benevolent Sovereign, who has a right to take one, and leave another, and who never afflicts willingly, or grieves the children of men. He always counts their tears and weighs their sorrows, before he causes them to exist. He never strikes a heavier blow, or wounds in a tenderer part, than he originally and benevolently intended. There are, indeed, grades of sorrow, and some are higher and heavier than others. But as none are too light, so none are too heavy. Thousands of parents have been bereaved of a son, or a daughter, who expired under their eyes, or in their arms; but such were light bereavements, in comparison with some that have fallen to the lot of others. You have heard of the bereavements of Job, whose servants were slain by the sword, and whose sons and daughters were destroyed by a tempest. You have heard of Jacob's troubles, when he believed, and had reason to believe, that his beloved Joseph was torn in pieces by wild beasts, and when he expected to lose his darling son Benjamin. You have heard of Aaron's bereavement, when his two sons were instantly smitten by the fire of heaven. These were emphatically heavy bereavements, but not too heavy for the bereaved to bear. You have heard of the patience of Job under his heavy and complicated afflictions. "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." You have heard of Jacob's language in the midst of his extraordinary trials. He said, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." That is, I am reconciled to have it so. You have heard of the calm, serene, and silent submission of Aaron. "And Aaron held his peace." God displays more wisdom, more goodness, as well as more sovereignty, in heavy than in light bereavements. For in all such cases, his wisdom appears superior to the wisdom of man; his goodness appears superior to the goodness of man; and his sovereignty appears superior to the sovereignty of all created beings. He does his work, his strange work, while the greatest, the wisest and best of his intelligent creatures look on and tremble. "The Lord reign-

eth, let the people tremble," and let the afflicted and bereaved submit, though their breach is great like the sea.

Those who are called to mourning this day, are not solitary mourners. They have fellow-sufferers not only in America, but in France and Britain. The awful fate of the Albion, wrecked on the coast of Ireland, has deeply affected the hearts of thousands, who lament not merely a private but public calamity. But they ought to be dumb, and not open their mouths, because the Lord hath done it, who had a right to do what he would with his own. We have heard of the number that sailed in that unfortunate ship. There were fifty: among these about forty perished. Among those that perished, were about twenty passengers. Among these, there were some very eminent and respectable characters, and in particular, Mr. ALEXANDER METCALF FISHER. Though he was young, and had not arrived at thirty years of age, yet he had arrived at more than common literary distinction. The Father of spirits gave him a clear discriminating mind, and endued him with superior intellectual powers, which were equally strong and well proportioned. These he early, constantly and assiduously cultivated and improved, and made rapid advances in every branch of knowledge to which he turned his attention. He read and studied upon a broad scale, after he left the place of his public education. He first paid attention to the theory of religion, and became accurately and extensively acquainted with the great and fundamental principles of theology. But he was called to relinquish his principal attention to this study, and to fill first one, and then the next to the highest office in Yale College; and in that department he shone with preëminent lustre. In mathematics and astronomy he left no superior, and perhaps no equal of his years, either in America or Great Britain. His profound knowledge and researches in these sciences have been very extensively known and admired. Professor FISHER was a young man of extraordinary promise. He had excited strong expectations of raising the literary character of his native country; and had his valuable life been spared, there is no ground to doubt but he would have fully answered these high expectations. But alas! his hopes, the hopes of his friends and of country, all sunk together in that awful night in which he sunk in the mighty deep! This was the Lord's doing, and who may say unto him, "What doest thou?" The father and mother, and brother and sisters of this highly fortunate and unfortunate young man, are now, and will be as long as they live, the principal mourners. They will never forget what was beautiful, amiable, dutiful, virtuous or pious in his short life. Though he never professed, yet

there is some ground to hope that he had experienced a saving change. But their present duty is to turn off their attention from him whom they lament, and gratefully acknowledge the goodness of God, in giving them such a son, and such a brother; and now cordially and unreservedly submit to his amiable and awful sovereignty in taking him away and sparing others. God may and certainly will do more good by his sudden, unexpected and alarming death, than he could have done by his life. They know not to how many his death may be sanctified. It may have a happy effect upon a very sensible and highly accomplished young lady, who may imagine she has the largest share of affliction in this instance of mortality. The parents may receive great benefit from it; and they certainly will, if they rightly improve it. The brother and sisters may receive great benefit from it; and they certainly will, if they rightly improve it. It ought to make a deep impression upon the minds of both parents and children in this place, and excite them to the faithful discharge of their mutual duties to each other. And it ought to make a deep impression upon the bereaved College, who have sustained a great, and it is to be feared, an irreparable loss. The certain prospect of the good which God will answer by this death, in all its aggravated circumstances, ought to heal the wound which every one has received by this great frown of providence. God has answered all his benevolent purposes by the life of the deceased; and he will answer all his benevolent purposes by his death, and all is well. So let the afflicted father and mother, brother and sisters, believe and feel and say, and all will be well with them. Amen.

# SERMON XXI.

## SILENCE UNDER AFFLICTION.

DEATH OF MISS SARAH EMMONS, JANUARY 19, 1823.

And Aaron held his peace. — Lev. x. 3.

After Moses had reared the tabernacle in the wilderness, and placed all its furniture in order, and spent seven days in consecrating Aaron and his sons to the sacred office, Nadab and Abihu his sons took each of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. The sudden and unexpected death of the young men was a very astonishing event, and calculated to pierce the heart of Aaron with extreme pain, sorrow and distress. Moses sincerely sympathized with his bereaved brother, and directed him to the only proper remedy of assuaging the anguish of his heart. "And Moses said unto Aaron, this is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace." By this he complied with the divine direction, and glorified God in the furnace of affliction. Such silence was a signal expression of Aaron's filial affection towards God, and unreserved submission to his fatherly chastisements. He was dumb, and opened not his mouth, because he was deeply sensible that it was God, his holy and righteous Sovereign, who had smitten his children, and sunk him in sorrow. He knew that he had no power to stay his hand, and no right to say unto him, "What doest thou?" He did as it became him; he held his peace, he bowed in silence to the sovereign will of God. This example of Aaron teaches all men,

That they ought to hold their peace, when God sees fit to afflict and bereave them.

We shall first consider what it is for men to hold their peace under the afflictive and bereaving hand of God; and then consider their obligations to do it.

I. Let us consider what it is for the afflicted and bereaved to hold their peace under the correcting hand of God. There was something very significant in Aaron's holding his peace while God laid his heavy hand upon him, and bereaved him of two sons by one sudden and unexpected stroke. There is no doubt but that Aaron's heart was very much bound up in these two sons, who he expected would have been his assistants, if not successors, in his sacred office. They were amiable and promising young men; for God had distinguished them by a peculiar mark of his favor. We read, "And he said unto Moses, come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel." But after these young men had exhibited so fair a character, and had been consecrated to the priest's office, they were so elated with their high station and bright prospects, that they precipitately did an act which cost them their lives. Without divine direction, they not only offered incense, but offered it with common or strange fire, instead of taking sacred fire from the sanctuary, which was always kept burning. For this presumptuous act, like Uzza's, they were struck dead in a moment. But under all these aggravating and heart-affecting circumstances of his sons' death, Aaron held his peace, by which he glorified God, and exhibited a bright example, which it becomes all the afflicted and bereaved to imitate. But what does this imply?

1. It certainly implies, in the first place, that the afflicted and bereaved should not complain of the divine conduct towards them. Mankind have always been apt to complain under the afflictive hand of God. Though Job, at first, bowed in silence to the sovereign hand of God, which had bereaved him of all his earthly enjoyments, yet he soon said, "I will not refrain my mouth: I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." He cursed the day of his birth, and poured forth a torrent of complaints too bitter to be repeated. Jeremiah betrayed the same weakness and wickedness under the heavy hand of God. Mankind in general are prone to murmur and complain of far lighter evils than those which fell on Job and Jeremiah. The children of Israel were continually murmuring under the trials and troubles that befell them in the wilderness. The voice of complaint is still heard a thousand times oftener than the voice of praise. But why should a living man complain under the heaviest evils

that fall to his lot? The afflicted and bereaved ought to be dumb, and not open their mouths in complaint. They have no ground to complain, because God takes nothing from them but what he has given them, and inflicts no more upon them than they deserve, and he has a right to inflict. This Aaron felt, and emphatically expressed, by holding his peace under the severe bereavement he was called to experience. While the afflicted presume to complain of God, they never exercise the least submission to his providence; but when they cease to complain, and hold their peace, they exhibit one mark of submission to the divine will. But,

2. For the afflicted to hold their peace, implies that they not only cease to complain, but that they cease to think hard of God. It is much easier to suppress their verbal complaints, than to suppress all their inward murmurings and repinings under the correcting hand of God. They can easily see that God has done them no wrong, and can readily say that the Judge of all the earth has done right; while at the same time they entertain and cherish hard thoughts of his wisdom and goodness. They are very apt to think hard of God for frowning upon them, while he is smiling upon others; for inflicting more evils upon them, than upon others; for inflicting much greater evils upon them, than upon others; and for inflicting upon them such evils as they are least able to bear. David acknowledged that he once let his murmuring and repining thoughts run in this strain. "I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever, doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" These hard thoughts of God he owns were the fruits and effects of his moral infirmity and imperfection. But they are too common to the afflicted, who love to pity themselves, by indulging such hard, rebellious thoughts towards God. Aaron indulged no such hard thoughts of God when he held his peace, and submitted to the hand that corrected him. The afflicted must cease to complain of God internally, as well as externally, in order to find favor and acceptance in his sight. But,

3. The only way in which the afflicted and bereaved can get rid of their inward murmuring and repining thoughts, is cordially to approve of the conduct of God in causing them to suffer their present afflictions and bereavements. Nothing can remove hatred of God, but love to God. Nothing can remove

opposition to God, but submission to God. And nothing can remove our disapprobation of God's conduct towards us, but a cordial approbation of it. God exercises the same wisdom and goodness in taking away, as in bestowing mercies. There is, therefore, the same reason to approve of his conduct in taking away as in bestowing mercies. Job at first viewed the dispensations of Providence towards him in this light. He said in his afflicted, bereaved, forlorn condition, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." He felt and acted just as every afflicted person ought to feel and act. He did not complain that God had given him any favor which he had not granted to others; nor that he had granted him more favors than he had granted to others; nor that he had granted him greater favors than he had granted to others. In this he sinned not. Nor did he sin by complaining that God had taken away more and greater favors from him than from others. And he had no more reason to complain that God had taken away so much, than that he had given him so much. This is true of all the afflicted and bereaved. Aaron had no more reason to complain that God had taken away, than that he had given him two such promising sons. The afflicted and bereaved always have the same reason to approve of God's conduct towards them in taking away, as in bestowing great and signal favors upon them. And the afflicted and bereaved never do properly hold their peace, and cease to complain internally as well as externally, until they do cordially approve of God's conduct in taking away what he has given them. Let us now consider,

II. Why the afflicted and bereaved ought to hold their peace, and silently submit to the correcting hand of God. This is their duty,

1. Because they always deserve the bereavements which they are called to suffer. All men have sinned, and deserved the marks of the divine displeasure, both in this life and in that which is to come. Bereavements are always marks of the divine displeasure towards the bereaved. They are under the same obligations to submit silently and unreservedly under the frowns of God, as to rejoice under his smiles. They should always feel affections towards him, which are correspondent to his providential dealings towards them. When he bereaves them of those whom they loved and valued, he manifests his displeasure for something wrong in their hearts and conduct, which calls for their humiliation and silent submission. Parents in particular never fail to be verily guilty in respect to

their children. They neglect to instruct them, to govern them, to restrain them, and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They forget that God has lent them their children, and required them to bring them up for him, and not for themselves. They consider them as their own, and as their own they love them too much, and place too great dependence upon them, and are ready to call in question God's right to take away what he has given them. Such conduct in parents is displeasing to God, and a solid reason why he should bereave and chasten them. There is the same reason why God should chastise mankind for their undue attachment to and dependence upon any other earthly objects and enjoyments. The afflicted and bereaved always deserve just such afflictions and bereavements as God calls them to experience. So that they have never reason to complain of God for treating them according to their deserts. No doubt Aaron had sinned in respect to his sons, by neglecting to educate them properly, by placing an undue affection and dependence upon them, and probably by neglecting to direct them in the duties of their office on the morning they died. He felt that he deserved to be bereaved, and held his peace. The afflicted prophet said, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned." All the afflicted and bereaved ought to feel as Aaron and the prophet did, and silently and unreservedly submit to the correcting hand of God, because they have sinned and deserve to be punished. For God always punishes them much less than they deserve, by the severest bereavements, afflictions and sufferings he calls them to endure.

2. The afflicted and bereaved ought to hold their peace, and silently submit to the correcting hand of God, because he has a right to afflict and bereave them, whenever he sees it necessary to do it. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is only if need be, that he pierces their hearts with sorrow. He never afflicts them so often, or so much, or so long, as they deserve to be afflicted. His mere justice does not require him to punish mankind in this world, according to their deserts, nor even to punish them at all. He acts according to the counsel of his own will, in the afflictive dispensations of providence. He has a right to afflict one, and not another, and to afflict one more than another. He exercises his wisdom and goodness, as well as his justice, in visiting mankind with afflictions and bereavements. He knows the tender ties, by which parents and children, brothers and sisters, and the nearest and dearest connections in life, are bound together; and what pain and anguish the living and dying will suffer, when these tender cords are severed by death.

But he does not regard the hopes, desires, and sorrows of either the living or dying, in taking away life at his own appointed time. He has a supreme regard to his own glory and the general good, in sending adversity, sickness, and death, when and where and to whom he pleases. This is his original and independent right, as the owner of the world, and the giver of every good and perfect gift. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Mankind have no independent right to their lives, or to any of the blessings of life. They all belong to God, who has a right to do what he will with his own. In every instance of bereavement, God takes nothing but what he has given. This the bereaved ought to believe and acknowledge. If he takes away their children, as he took Aaron's away, they ought to hold their peace, without a murmuring thought. Or they ought to say as Eli did, on a similar occasion, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Or as Job did, when he stripped him of all his earthly enjoyments, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." It is always true of the afflicted, that it is of the Lord's mercies, that they are not consumed. As God's right to afflict and bereave is unlimited, so the afflicted and bereaved ought to exercise an unreserved and unlimited submission to his afflictive, bereaving, chastising hand.

3. It becomes the afflicted and bereaved to bow in silence to the sovereign will of God, because he always afflicts and bereaves them at the proper time. The time of afflictions and bereavements often gives them great weight and pungency. Men are apt to murmur and repine because their troubles and afflictions come upon them in an evil time, when they feel less prepared and able to bear them, than at any other time. They are ready to say that if they had been afflicted when they were young, or when they were in their full strength and vigor, or at any time before they felt the infirmities of old age, they could have borne it; but now their afflictions are too heavy for their feeble powers to support. But all ought to remember that God knows the best times to afflict them, and always chooses the best times to do it. He may see it best that some should bear the yoke in their youth; that some should bear the yoke in riper years; that some should bear the yoke in their declining days; and that some should be afflicted, time after time, from the morning to the evening of life, and then receive the heaviest stroke. If it were left to the afflicted to choose the time of affliction, they would never know what time to choose. If it had been left to Aaron when his sons should die, he would not have chosen that they both should have died the

same day, and the next day after he and they had been consecrated to the priest's office. If Eli had been allowed to choose the time of his sons' death, he would not have chosen that they should have died in one day, and at a time when he was stooping under the decays of nature, and when the bare news of his bereavement was more than he could support, and live. It is well that God does not allow men to choose when he shall afflict them, but has reserved the times and seasons in his own power. He always knows the best time to afflict them, and when he does afflict them, they must know that he sees good reasons to afflict them at that time, rather than any other. And since he sees good reasons for afflicting them at such a particular time, they have no ground to complain, but ought silently to submit to his unerring wisdom, whether they are high or low, or whether they are young or old. I must add,

4. That men ought to hold their peace under the afflicting hand of God, because he always afflicts them in the best way, as well as at the best time. God is perfectly acquainted with all the children of men. He knows their corporeal construction, their mental powers, their hopes and fears, desires and pursuits. He knows their most vulnerable parts, and what will give them the most painful sensations. Of course, he always knows the best way to afflict them, or give them pain, which is the design of affliction. No affliction is joyous, but grievous. He always means to give more or less pain to those whom he afflicts. And among the innumerable species of affliction, he always employs that which is best adapted to answer his wise and holy purpose, in respect to every one of the afflicted. If he afflicts one by poverty, another by sickness, another by losses, another by disappointments, and another by bereavements, each individual may know that he has chosen the best way to afflict him in particular. He knows that poverty will afflict some, more than sickness; that sickness will afflict some, more than poverty; that losses will afflict some, more than sickness; that disappointments will afflict some, more than losses; and that bereavements will afflict some, more than any other evils or calamities. He always knows, therefore, where to send poverty, where to send sickness, where to send losses, where to send disappointments, and where to send the severest bereavements; and, accordingly, he afflicts the vast variety of individuals in the wisest and best manner, which ought to prevent every complaint. But how often do individuals complain of the nature, the degree or duration of their own peculiar afflictions! They imagine that there is no sorrow like unto their sorrow, and that they would patiently bear any other afflictions than those with which God has visited them in his

anger. But they never know whether this is true; and if it be true, they must know that God has visited them with the very afflictions which are the best adapted to their peculiar state and character. Abraham's trials were the best for him; Jacob's troubles were the best for him; Eli's afflictions were the best for him; and Aaron's bereavements were the best for him. God struck him where he knew it would give him the keenest sensations of sorrow and grief; which were directly suited to do him the greatest good. And for that reason, it became him to hold his peace, and not utter a murmuring word, or indulge a murmuring thought. No man has any reason to complain of any affliction with which God pleases to visit him, because it is the best affliction for him that infinite wisdom and goodness can devise. This is a sufficient reason why all the afflicted should bow in silence and submission to the wise and holy will of God. God knew that they deserved to be afflicted, that they needed to be afflicted, that they needed just such afflictions as he has sent, and that they needed them at the very time he has sent them; and they have reason to believe that he knew what was good for them, better than they knew what was good for themselves. They have no reason to complain, but every reason to hold their peace, and silently and cordially submit to the justice, the wisdom and goodness of God in drowning their hearts in sorrow.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from the nature of silent submission under divine corrections, that it must be highly pleasing to God. It is the very spirit which he requires them to feel and express while he lays his chastising hand upon them. He says to them, "Be still, and know that I am God." By exercising such silent, cordial and unlimited submission, they give him the throne in their hearts, and take their proper place at his footstool; they accept the punishment of their iniquities, and ascribe righteousness to their Maker, and they cordially approve of his justice as well as of his wisdom and goodness, in subjecting them to all the sorrows and sufferings which they actually experience. God must be pleased to see his guilty and afflicted creatures lie in such an humble and submissive attitude before him. And he expressly tells them so. "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." When Moses told Aaron that God would be sanctified and glorified by

those whom he had afflicted and sorely bereaved, he instantly held his peace, and bowed in cordial submission to the sovereign will of God. Aaron never appeared in a more amiable and acceptable attitude in the sight of God, than while he laid his hand on his mouth, and significantly expressed his cordial and unlimited submission to his holy and righteous Sovereign. This is the very effect which divine corrections are ultimately designed to produce. As soon as Abraham submitted to the command to offer up his son, his trial ceased; and as soon as Jacob said, If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved, and I am willing to be so, his trial ceased. When any trial, affliction or bereavement has produced sincere submission to the correcting hand of God, it has produced the most virtuous, amiable and acceptable effect, in the divine view, that it could produce. When the afflicted and bereaved silently and cordially submit to divine corrections, they perform a peculiar, trying duty, which of all others, in their situation, is the most glorifying and acceptable to God.

2. It appears from the nature of sincere submission under trials and afflictions, that insubmission is extremely criminal and displeasing to God. There is no sin, perhaps, to which mankind are so universally liable, as insubmission under the afflictive dispensations of providence. God is every where and every day trying the children of men with lighter or heavier afflictions, which are very disagreeable to the human heart. Where can we find one, who has not a portion, and, as he thinks, a large portion of the common, if not uncommon, evils of life? And where can we find any, who silently, cordially and constantly submit to the sufferings that fall to their lot? This world, which is full of the goodness of God, is a murmuring and complaining world. But God has never taken away any thing from them, or inflicted any thing upon them, that gives them any just ground to complain of his injustice or unkindness. He treats them all infinitely better than they deserve. Though he often corrects them, yet his corrections are always mixed with mercy, and milder than strict justice requires. If they ever complain under his severest corrections, they complain without a cause, and express an ungrateful, undutiful and rebellious spirit towards their Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and supreme Sovereign. And can there be any thing more odious and criminal in poor dependent, guilty creatures, than to stand and contend with their Maker, while he is using the most powerful means to suppress and subdue such a rebellious spirit? This spirit has been visibly acted out under divine corrections, and in such cases has appeared extremely criminal and malignant. Pharaoh is a strik-

ing instance. He refused to submit to the chastising hand of God, to his own destruction. Jacob at one time, and David at another, refused to be comforted, which was actually refusing to submit to the correcting hand of God. And Jonah said, he did well to be angry, and complain of the unkindness of God in his affliction. When either saints or sinners murmur and complain under divine corrections, they practically say that he who has made them shall not reign over them. Can there be any thing more criminal and displeasing to God, in those whom he afflicts, than their indulging and expressing such a rebellious spirit?

3. It appears from the nature of true submission under afflictions, that it is something different from stupidity. Stupidity consists in despising the chastenings of the Lord. Mankind are far more apt to be stupid, than to be faint, under afflictions and bereavements. They try to overlook the hand of God in them, and to consider them as mere accidents, or necessary evils, which could not be avoided, and must be borne. And they summon up all their strength and fortitude to bear them with self-composure and self-sufficiency. They banish them from their thoughts as much as possible, by attending to more agreeable objects. Though God has taken away one earthly object of their affection, they try to find another to supply its place. Though God has taken away one son, or one daughter, they turn their attention and affections upon those that are left. And though God has bereaved them of all their children, they resolve to derive as much satisfaction and happiness from the world and the things of the world, as they can. Instead of turning to God who afflicts them, they strive to turn from him, lest the thoughts of his displeasure should disturb their peace, and awaken them from their pleasing stupidity, which they wish to consider, and have it considered as calm and silent submission. But there is not the least submission in it. It is rather a species of obstinacy, by which they refuse to regard the operations of God's hand, and the operations of their hearts under it. Such stupidity under divine corrections in the sinners in Zion, God severely condemned. Therefore saith the prophet, "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction." If afflictions do not remove stupidity, they increase it; if they do not soften the heart, they harden it; and if they do not produce submission, they create obstinacy. They always produce a good or bad effect. But the afflicted are extremely apt to misconstrue the effect of their afflictions, and to mistake stupidity for submission, and imagine that they feel resigned, when they only feel stupid and insensible. But,

4. True submission is diametrically opposite to stupidity, and is perfectly consistent with the keenest sensibility under the correcting hand of God. Divine corrections are marks of the divine displeasure. God corrects to give pain, and he gives pain to the bereaved to manifest his displeasure towards them. They may, therefore, exercise perfect submission, while they have the most painful sense of the divine displeasure, and of the loss they have sustained. Though submission will produce silence, yet it will not produce insensibility. Sensibility is so far from being inconsistent with submission, that it is absolutely essential to its existence. No person can exercise submission while he feels no evil. If God did not mean to give pain and grief by bereavements, the bereaved would be under no obligation to submit. For they are not in duty bound to submit to pain or distress itself, but only to the just, and wise and benevolent Being who inflicts it. It is a proper sense of the divine displeasure manifested in bereavements, that gives them their greatest weight and emphasis, and the greater bereavements are, the more they display the divine displeasure. It becomes the bereaved, therefore, to view their bereavements, as far as possible, in all their painful effects and consequences, that they may exercise a deep and unlimited submission to the divine corrections. Though Aaron held his peace, and refrained from speaking, yet he did not refrain from thinking. His mind was undoubtedly awake, and all his powers and faculties in vigorous exercise. He was capable and disposed to take a serious, affecting and extensive view of the nature, extent, and painful consequences of his bereavement. It came in an evil time, just as he and his sons were entering on the most sacred and responsible office, and when they stood in peculiar need of the divine favor and presence. It blasted all the fond hopes and expectations of both him and his sons. It was a peculiar mark of the divine displeasure towards him, his sons, his family, and his friends. The wounds were deep and lasting, and the more seriously and intensely he reflected upon them, the more sensibly he felt his hands weakened, his heart discouraged, and his usefulness diminished. But while feeling the present and anticipating the future effects of his bereavement, he held his peace, and cordially and unreservedly submitted to the chastening hand of God. The afflicted and bereaved ought always to realize that their afflictions and bereavements come from God, and to view them in all their painful effects and consequences, that they may feel the rod, hear the voice, and submit to the will of him who has appointed them. The keenest sensibility under the correcting hand of God prepares the way for the purest, sincerest, and most unreserved submission to his wise and holy providence.

There is much more danger of feeling too little, than of feeling too much, under divine chastisements.

5. If the afflicted and bereaved ought to hold their peace under the chastising hand of God, then they ought to submit to the heaviest, as well as to the lightest chastisements. God acts as justly, as wisely, and as benevolently, in afflicting one person, as another; and he never afflicts any person more than he deserves. He always sends heavy, as well as light afflictions, at the most proper time, and in the most proper weight and measure. He never strikes a lighter or heavier blow than his wisdom and goodness require him to strike. Aaron and Eli had the same reasons to submit to God, in suddenly and unexpectedly destroying their sons, that Jonah had to submit to God in destroying his gourd. Aaron held his peace under a very heavy, but Jonah did not, under a very light affliction. And mankind in general are less disposed to submit to light, than to heavy afflictions. The reason is, they overlook the hand of God in light, but are constrained to see it in heavy afflictions. Great sensibility prepares the mind for great submission; and great afflictions produce great sensibility, and of course generally do the afflicted the greatest good. Whom did God ever more severely afflict than Aaron, Job, David, and Manasseh? And who ever derived more benefit from afflictions and bereavements than they did? David acknowledged, that it had been good for him that he had been afflicted. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. God more frequently and more severely chastens the righteous than the wicked; and those whom he most severely chastises generally derive the most instruction and benefit from their chastisements. God much oftener afflicts men for their profit, than he prospers them for their profit. Prosperity tends to corrupt the heart, but adversity to purify it. Prosperity tends to attach men to the world, but adversity to wean them from it. It is probable that prosperity has destroyed ten where adversity has destroyed one. Adversity tends to prepare the young for living, and the aged for dying. According to the common course of providence, the closing scenes of life are generally attended, not only with more cares, more pains and infirmities of body and mind, but with greater losses, disappointments, and bereavements. Those who live long in this world, outlive their earthly prospects, their once flourishing families, their nearest and dearest connections and friends, and stand alone, like aged trees stripped of their verdure, and exposed to fall by every blast that blows. But they have no reason to complain; for all their losses, disappointments and bereavements are happily suited to prepare them for their great and last change.

The aged, of all men, have the most reason to hold their peace, and silently submit to all the sorrows and afflictions that fall to their lot.

6. It appears from the nature of submission, that it is easy for the afflicted and bereaved to determine whether they do or do not sincerely submit to the correcting hand of God. There is no medium between approving or disapproving his conduct in afflicting them. They desire to see or not to see, to feel or not to feel, and to submit or not to submit, to his chastising hand. They never feel indifferent, whether he smiles or frowns upon them in his providence. They always do, in reality, either submit to or oppose his providential dealings towards them. And if they will only critically and impartially examine the exercises of their hearts, they will discover either silent submission, or internal murmurings and complaints. David kept his heart with so much diligence, that he knew when he was dumb, and opened not his mouth, and when he *refused* to be comforted. God heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." "Surely after that I was turned I repented; and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." The afflicted may always know whether they have or have not submitted to the correcting hand of God, and whether they have been instructed and benefitted by divine corrections, or only stupified and hardened. But they generally choose to leave this important point undecided, and to remain in a state of doubt between hope and fear. This appears from the common observations which the afflicted make upon their past trials, afflictions and bereavements. They frequently say that they have had a hard lot in life, but seldom say that it has been good for them that they have been afflicted and bereaved. They hardly know whether they have been resigned or unresigned to the correcting hand of God. This is totally wrong. For it is his design in their adversity to lead them to consider, and to search and try their hearts, that they may know whether they are his children, and heirs of everlasting life.

The whole tenor of the present discourse now calls upon all the afflicted and bereaved to inquire whether they have improved or misimproved the trials, afflictions and bereavements, that they have from time to time experienced. Persons of this description are extremely numerous. They are to be found everywhere, every year, every month, and every day. "Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." Though God has been very gracious to this people for years

past, and preserved them from those epidemic and mortal disorders which have spread consternation, mourning and misery in other places; yet he has here, from time to time, called not a few to experience the pain and anguish of severe bereavements. It deeply concerns all who have been afflicted or bereaved at one time or another, to look back upon the trying scenes through which they have been called to pass, and to review their past views and feelings under the correcting hand of God, that they may know whether they have learned obedience and submission, by the things they have suffered. But there is no person present, to whom it so properly belongs to perform the plain, difficult and important duty of self-examination, as the speaker. He has been a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. God has bereaved him of father and mother, of brothers and sisters, of one nearer and dearer than either, of several young, tender, fair branches of his family, and of all his contemporary brethren in the work of the ministry. God has called him to bear the yoke in his youth, in his riper years, and now even under the infirmities of old age. He has poured out to him another cup of the wormwood and the gall, while the bitterness of the former cups is still in remembrance. God has recently and prematurely bereaved him of a dear daughter, upon whom it was natural to place some hopes and some dependence; but those hopes and that dependence are now buried with her in the grave. He may now with more propriety, and he hopes with a better spirit, say as Jacob said, I will go down into the grave unto my daughter mourning. He may be allowed to mourn, but not to murmur. He knows it becomes him to hold his peace, and not open his mouth, because the Lord has done it. But you will permit me to make the same request that Job made on a similar occasion: "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me."

# SERMON XXII.

## THE TROUBLES OF LIFE DIVINELY APPOINTED.

MARCH 10, 1821.

ALTHOUGH affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. — JOB, v. 6, 7.

WHEN Job was first bereaved and afflicted, he felt and expressed cordial and unreserved submission to the holy hand of God. He said from the heart, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He might have continued in this proper and happy frame of mind, had not Satan obtained permission to assault him, by his subtile and malignant suggestions, which moved him to murmur and repine under his complicated afflictions and bereavements. While he was in this forlorn condition, his friends came to mourn with him, and comfort him. But after sitting a long time in silence, and hearing his bitter complaints, they thought it more proper to reprove his despondency, than to assuage his grief. Here Eliphaz took the lead, and among other things observed, that his case was not so singular as he imagined and represented; for not only individuals, but all men without exception, share in the evils and calamities of the present life, which God meant should be full of trouble. "Although," says he, "affliction cometh not forth from the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man," that is, every man, "is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." By this, he means to remind Job of what he had before acknowledged, that the troubles and afflictions of the present state do not come by chance or accident, but flow from the appointment of God, who made and governs the world.

The text, in its plain import, suggests this melancholy truth to our present consideration:

That God has ordained that this should be a troublesome world to all mankind. I shall,

I. Show that this is a troublesome world. And,

II. Inquire why God ordained it to be so.

I. I am to show that this is a troublesome world.

Could we all have a clear and comprehensive view of this world at once, we should all form precisely the same opinion of it. There is not a moment when sorrowing, sighing and mourning universally cease. There is continually a great multitude of individuals, who are groaning under pains of body, and the more intolerable agonies of mind. But we are apt to judge of the world according to what passes within the small circle of our own observation and experience. And in this very partial and imperfect view, it often appears more a delightful than a troublesome world. Hence arises the propriety of illustrating a truth, which we all sometimes believe and sometimes disbelieve, that we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Here I might observe, that every thing in this world has a tendency to give pain, trouble and distress to the weak, ignorant, depraved creatures who inhabit it. But not to wander in such a wide and extensive field, I shall confine myself to the following particulars.

1. The elements of which the world is composed are not only troublesome, but often destructive to mankind. The earth, the air, the water, and the fire, which are the constituent parts of the material system with which we are connected, produce innumerable evils among the human race. The surface of the earth is so rough and uneven, so full of rocks, and mountains, and caverns, and pits, and hideous places, that it is difficult and dangerous for mankind to move upon it. Our Saviour himself found it wearisome and fatiguing to traverse the regions of Judea, one of the best cultivated spots on the face of the earth. And all mankind have found the same difficulties and dangers in traversing the various parts of the world. Besides, the things which grow out of the earth, and which afford both food and medicine to mankind, often prove prejudicial and fatal to them. The air we breathe, and by which life is supported, teems with ten thousand noxious qualities, which are the seeds of innumerable distressing and destructive disorders. This is the case of the air in its most calm and serene state; but when it rises into winds, and storms, and hurricanes, it spreads misery and destruction far and wide, by sea and land. Millions have perished by means of this element with which we are constantly surrounded.

Water, which is so agreeable to the palate and so refreshing to the thirsty, is a dangerous element, and frequently productive of great and fatal evils to mankind. When its small and harmless particles are congealed into frost, and hail, and snow, and ice, or collected in large and rapid streams, or gathered together in the mighty ocean, they destroy thousands and thousands of the human race. It is a common observation, that fire is a good servaut, but a bad master. How often has it raged without restraint, and laid not only villages, towns and cities in ashes, but destroyed the lives of multitudes! Thus all the elements which compose the world are a fruitful source of troubles, calamities, afflictions and sorrows, to the children of men. They know not when nor where they are entirely safe from the war of elements. The earth may crush, or the air may suffocate, or the water may drown, or the fire may consume them, so long as they inhabit this troublesome world.

2. The great changes which take place in the world, from year to year, render it not only troublesome, but very distressing and destructive to its inhabitants. Every one of the four seasons of the year brings with it peculiar trials, labors, dangers and diseases. Though the winter be healthy to the young and vigorous, it is no less injurious to the health, the comfort, the safety and lives of the aged and infirm. More of this last description of men languish and die in this, than in any other season of the year. And when this season does not prove fatal to the young or to the aged, it nevertheless wrecks their constitution, and paves the way for painful and mortal disorders, in the following seasons. The transition from winter to spring never fails to give a shock to the bodily machine, and often brings on acute diseases, and renders chronic disorders fatal. The change from spring to summer is perhaps the least dangerous season of the year. But the change from summer to autumn is extremely hazardous. The most inflammatory and mortal distempers often prevail in this season, and carry off many of the most healthy and vigorous of every age. Indeed, every change of season is more or less afflictive, and never fails to be more or less injurious to the health, the happiness, and lives of men. If the seasons were uniformly temperate, and mankind never experienced any extremes of cold and hot, or of wet and dry weather, they would probably escape a vast many bodily pains and disorders, and enjoy a great deal more vigor of body and mind, than they do at present.

3. Many parts of the world are filled with a vast variety of animals, which are extremely hostile and troublesome to mankind. Ever since the apostacy of man, God has put enmity between the animal creation and the human species. How

many poor unfortunate creatures have fallen victims to the wild beasts of the forests, or to the monsters in the sea, or to venomous serpents that creep on the earth! Nor are some tamed animals less dangerous and mortal, when armed for war, or provoked to revenge. But though we can generally guard ourselves against the fatal attacks of such fierce and venomous creatures, yet we cannot prevent their corrupting the air, and spreading plagues and pestilences through towns, and cities, and whole provinces. Animated nature abounds with creatures which, both living and dying, are injurious to the health, and often fatal to the lives of men. And we have good reason to believe that God has created and preserved every beast of the field, every fowl of the air, and every creeping thing, for some valuable purpose; and in particular for the wise and holy purpose of making this a troublesome world.

4. This world is full of evil, on account of the moral depravity which universally prevails among its human inhabitants. Man is the greatest enemy of man. All the other evils and calamities which have been mentioned, are light and few, in comparison with those which spring out of the corruption of the human heart. This sets all mankind, more or less, at variance with each other. This is the representation which the apostle gives of the present state of human nature. "There is none righteous, no, not one." "They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known." A world filled with such corrupt and depraved natures must be a troublesome world to live in. And it appears from both sacred and profane history, that it always has been so. Cain killed his righteous brother Abel. Nimrod was a mighty warrior, and a scourge to his fellow men. The heathen were a scourge to the Jews, and the Jews were a scourge to the heathen. All nations have exerted their power and malignity in spreading misery and destruction among one another. But the personal injuries which individuals give and receive are far more numerous than public calamities, and much more troublesome and grievous to endure. And in these, all men, whether high or low, rich or poor, young or old, good or bad, have almost an equal share. By being born sinners, they are all born to give and feel trouble. And if they had power equal to their depravity, they would lay the world, and even the universe, in ruins. I must add,

5. This is a troublesome world, on account of the heavy and complicated calamities which are inflicted by the immediate hand of God. He presides over the natural and moral world, and employs both as instruments of bringing trouble, misery and death upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He is continually defeating the designs, blasting the hopes, and dissolving the tender ties of mankind, by which he throws husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and the dearest friends and connections, into the furnace of affliction. How numerous are the sons and daughters of sorrow in this evil, sickly and dying world! God exercises a particular providence over natural and moral causes, and can commission the sword or pestilence, the fire or the water, the heat or the cold, the mote or the insect, the friend or the foe, to inflict pains, troubles, diseases and death upon the children of men, notwithstanding all their wisdom, prudence and precaution to avoid these evils. He wounds and he heals, he kills and makes alive, and there is none that can deliver out of his hands. He means that this world shall be a state of discipline, and continually holds the rod of correction in his hand, and employs it every day in chastising some of the human race. He will maintain this mode of discipline, and continue to correct both nations and individuals to the end of time. So that this will never cease to be a troublesome world as long as it exists. It is now natural to inquire,

II. Why God ordained this state of things, or made this a troublesome world. He could have made this world as free from trouble as any other world now is, or ever will be. He could have made the world like the garden of Eden, and the garden of Eden like the paradise above. We can easily conceive of several ways in which he might have greatly if not entirely prevented the evils which now overspread the world. He might have so formed and arranged all the material elements, as to have prevented earthquakes, volcanoes, storms and conflagrations, as well as all painful and mortal diseases. He might have given a friendly and harmless disposition to both rational and irrational creatures, and so formed both the natural and moral world, that no natural or moral evil could have been seen or felt in it. The question now returns — why did God ordain that this should be a troublesome world to all that are born in it? To this I answer in general, it was because he knew that all the children of men would be born sinners. There is reason to believe that God framed the world in view of the apostacy of Adam, and adapted it to the foreseen state of his sinful posterity. And this leads me to observe,

1. That God ordained this to be a troublesome world,

because mankind deserve trouble. It was fit that God should provide such a habitation for such creatures as the human race are. It was fit that they should be placed in a world very different from that in which holy beings are placed. It was fit they should dwell in brittle houses of clay, in a valley of tears, and a world of darkness, trouble and affliction, where every thing around them should remind them of their unworthiness, and the displeasure of God towards them for their apostacy and disobedience. Natural evil is the only proper punishment of moral evil. There is no ground to suppose that there ever would have been any natural evil in this world, if moral evil had never come into it. Since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, they deserve to feel all the pains, and disappointments, and bereavements, and sorrows, which fall to their lot in this troublesome world. They have reason to say, amidst their greatest troubles, that they are punished far less than they deserve at the hands of their offended Sovereign. Why should a living man complain of a troublesome world, which is infinitely better than he has deserved?

2. God ordained this to be a troublesome world, to wean mankind from it. They are naturally too much attached to this world, notwithstanding all the evils and afflictions they suffer in it. The good they enjoy overbalances the evils they endure; and instead of desiring to leave the world, they wish, and desire, and sometimes vainly hope, that their houses may continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations. How few are there, who have lived long enough to be completely satisfied with living, and desirous of leaving their present dark and dreary abode! But when God causes men to experience trouble upon trouble, and sorrow upon sorrow, and dissolves one tender connection after another, they often grow less and less attached to this evil world, and become more and more reconciled to leaving it. Trouble made Job say of life, "I loathe it: I would not live alway." And trouble always has a tendency to wean mankind more or less from the vain pursuits and uncertain prospects of this short and delusive state. It was wise in God, therefore, to make this a troublesome world, when he had determined that men should not live for ever: but after a few years or few days go to their long home. We commonly find that the young and prosperous, who have never drunk deep of the cup of sorrows, are more fond of the world, and more reluctant to going out of it, than those who have been bowed down under the weight of heavy afflictions and sore bereavements. The means which God employs always produce the effects which he intended to produce. And since we find by experience and observation, that

the troubles and afflictions in this present evil world do actually serve to wean mankind from it, we may justly conclude, that God made it an evil world to answer this salutary and important purpose. Besides,

3. There is another good reason to be given, why God ordained this to be a troublesome world; and that is, to prepare those who live in it for their future and final state. All troubles, afflictions, sorrows, and bereavements, are trials of the human heart. They have a powerful tendency to draw forth both virtuous and sinful exercises, and so to prepare men for future happiness or misery. It is, by means of worldly troubles, that God often awakens the attention, alarms the fears, convinces the consciences, and subdues the hearts of sinners. He took this method to restrain, reform, and convert Manasseh. And when he resolved to arrest the careless and stout-hearted sinners in Zion, he said, "I will melt them and try them." Many have been chosen, and tried, and purified in the furnace of affliction. It is also by the means of the afflictive dispensations of providence, that God sometimes prepares men for final ruin. By this method, he hardened the hearts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and fitted them for their awful doom. And it is by the means of singular troubles and fiery trials, that God refines and beautifies the characters of sincere and eminent believers. By such rough means, he formed the beautiful character of Abraham, of Joseph, of Moses, of Job, of David, of Daniel, and of all the prophets and apostles, and even of Christ himself, who through sufferings was made perfect. A troublesome world is well adapted to be a place of trial, and a place of trial is well adapted to prepare mankind for their final condition. The troubles of life never fail to make men either better or worse, and to form their character for eternity. God orders all the natural evils in this world, in weight, and in measure, and in duration, so as to answer his eternal purposes, respecting the final destination of the human race. He has wise and good ends to answer, by making this a troublesome world to all who live in it. It is every way fitted to express his feelings, to try their hearts, and prepare them for endless joy or sorrow, according to their views, and feelings, and conduct, under his correcting hand.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since God has ordained this to be a troublesome world, it is a very great favor that he has given us his word, which unfolds his wise and holy designs in making and governing all things. The mere light of nature does not discover to

mankind the source of the evils which fall upon them. Though they are generally very little concerned to know from whence comes the good they enjoy, yet they have always been both curious and anxious to know from whence comes the evil they suffer. This important question has been agitated in all ages and among all nations. The Philistines were anxious to know whether the sore evils they were suffering were inflicted by some invisible power, or were the effect of mere blind and unmeaning chance. And mankind ever since have generally been as much puzzled to account for the troubles, and afflictions, and sufferings, which abound in this present evil world, as the Philistines were. They have commonly been disposed to ascribe the evils of life to nature, rather than to the God of nature. But the Bible teaches us that they come from the Creator and Governor of the world, who causes them to take place to answer wise and benevolent purposes. This throws light upon every evil that falls upon a city, or family, or any individual person. Nothing but the Bible can dispel the darkness, the thick darkness which rests upon divine providence. Neither heathens, who have never seen the Bible, nor infidels, who do not believe it, can see the least gleam of light respecting the evils that they or others suffer. The heathen are represented as "sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death." And infidels are represented as saying, "The Lord hath forsaken the earth." "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." The great mass of mankind are now groping in heathenish or infidel darkness, and cannot account for any public calamities or personal afflictions. It is therefore an unspeakable favor, that we enjoy the word of God, which explains the ways of providence, and throws light upon the dark side of things in this present evil world. The gospel has brought life and immortality to light, and assures us that God has made this an evil world, for the benevolent purpose of preparing us for a future and better world. And what can be more consoling to mankind, while they are passing through the afflictive and trying scenes of life, than to know that they come from the heart and hand of an infinitely wise and benevolent being, who will bring light out of darkness, and joy out of sorrow, to all his submissive and dutiful subjects. The Bible is an infallible guide and support to all the afflicted who read, believe, and love it. It exhibits such glorious truths and objects, as are sufficient to spread light, and peace, and consolation, to all who are travelling the strait, and narrow and rugged path to eternal life.

2. As God had wise and good reasons for making this a troublesome world, we may justly conclude that he has as wise and good reasons for not making it any more troublesome than

it is. Though it affords a great deal of evil, yet it affords much more good than evil. Mankind very seldom enjoy good without a mixture of evil, and never suffer evil without a mixture of good. Notwithstanding the numerous evils that fall to the lot of mankind, they are generally in a state of joy, rather than in a state of sorrow. This appears both from observation and experience. We constantly see many more rejoicing than mourning; and we find it much more easy to rejoice with those who rejoice, than to mourn with those that mourn. But if we were more sorrowful than joyful, we should be more disposed to associate with the sorrowful than with the joyful, and to mourn with those who mourn, than to rejoice with those who rejoice. How hard do people generally find it, to bring their views and feelings into unison with mourners at a funeral! But how easy do they find it to bring their views and feelings into unison with those who rejoice at a festival! The truth is, though God has made this a troublesome world, yet he hath filled the earth with his goodness. God is good, and doeth good, and his tender mercies are over all his works. The good he dispenses far exceeds the evil he inflicts. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is only if need be, that he sends sickness, afflictions and bereavements to the children of men. But he might have made this world tenfold more troublesome than it is; and he undoubtedly would have done it, had he not designed it to be a state of trial, and not of final retribution. He never afflicts any but those whom he finds it necessary to afflict; and he never lays more or greater burdens upon any, than he sees it necessary to lay upon them. He is here training up rational and immortal creatures for a future and eternal state, and dispenses both good and evil in the wisest and best manner, to prepare them for their final destination. When milder methods fail of producing such effects upon the hearts and lives of men, as he sees necessary to produce, he employs the rod of correction, and throws them into the furnace of affliction. Some will not be taught by any other means but briars and thorns, and a series and complication of afflictions. He is constrained to "melt them and try them." But he refrains from chastising them as long as infinite wisdom and goodness will permit. He told his backsliding people, that he was extremely reluctant to punish them. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man." God makes this troublesome world as free from

trouble as he possibly can, consistently with his great and good design in creating it.

3. Since this is a troublesome world to all who are born and live in it, we have reason to think that some are not so much more happy than others, as they are ready to imagine. Though mankind are dispersed all over the world, and placed in very different external circumstances, yet we cannot determine, that their happiness or unhappiness bears an exact proportion to their external circumstances. Every person knows his own circumstances better than those of another, and his own happiness or unhappiness better than the happiness or unhappiness of another. Mankind are more apt to think that they suffer more than others, than that they enjoy more than others; and this comparison, which they are so apt to make, is one of the greatest sources of unhappiness in the world. They judge of one another's happiness and unhappiness, by what they see, and not by what they know. The poor imagine that they are more unhappy than the rich; the sickly, that they are more unhappy than the healthy; the unfortunate, that they are more unhappy than the fortunate; and the afflicted, that they are more unhappy than those in prosperity. But in all these cases, they judge of one another by outward appearance, and not by internal views and feelings. And this is a very fallacious way of judging. Every man's heart knows its own bitterness, and not the bitterness of another's. One man suffers more from one evil, than another would from the same evil. One man suffers more in one situation, than another would in the same situation. One man suffers more from one misfortune, than another would from the same misfortune. The exterior circumstances of mankind are far from being a certain criterion of their internal happiness, or unhappiness. The servant is often much happier than the master; and the subject much happier than the prince; and the poor much happier than the rich; and the unfortunate than the fortunate. The rich and the poor meet together, and stand much nearer upon a level, in respect to worldly happiness or unhappiness, than either are ready to imagine. They are all born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward; and one is extremely apt to think that he has a larger portion of it than another, and that there is no sorrow like unto his sorrow.

4. Since this is ordained to be a troublesome world, it is folly and presumption in any to expect that they shall escape the common evils of life, and enjoy uninterrupted prosperity and happiness. Those who are prosperous in the morning or meridian of life, are extremely apt to imagine that their mountain stands strong, and that they shall never meet with the

troubles and fiery trials which abound in this evil world. But such raised hopes and expectations of undisturbed and growing prosperity lay a foundation for the greatest disappointments, sorrows and afflictions. And it appears from observation and experience, that those who are most prosperous and freest from troubles in the earlier part of life, experience the greatest troubles, losses, and disappointments in their latter days. As adversity prepares men for future prosperity, so prosperity prepares men for future adversity. And adversity is always to be expected in some period of life, or through the whole course of it. A whole life of adversity, however, is as uncommon, as a whole life of prosperity. Both are very rare instances. But the most prosperous in the beginning of life always have the most reason to expect the greatest disappointments, and consequently, the greatest afflictions, before the close of life. For they commonly have the highest hopes and the greatest interests and enjoyments to lose. Had not Job been the greatest and most prosperous man of the East, he could not have suffered the greatest losses, disappointments and afflictions. All sources of happiness may become sources of sorrow, and occasion a thousand wounds at once. The young, therefore, are extremely unwise to cherish high hopes and expectations that, by their own wisdom and precaution, or by the undeserved smiles of Providence, they shall escape the common evils and calamities of life, and pass through this troublesome world in uninterrupted prosperity. Nor is it merely unwise, but presumptuous. For God has forbidden them to boast of to-morrow, and seek great things for themselves.

5. Since all men are born to trouble in this world, as the sparks fly upward, they ought to live in the exercise of universal sympathy and compassion. They are continually seeing and hearing of one another's troubles, afflictions, and sorrows. Scarcely a day passes but the voice of joy is interrupted with the voice of the afflicted or bereaved. Their eyes and their ears ought to affect their hearts, and excite their sympathy and compassion for their fellow sufferers in this evil and troublesome world. They all know what trouble is, for they have all more or less drank of the bitter cup of the wormwood and the gall, and have wished for the pity and compassion of others. God has commanded them to weep with those that weep, as well as to rejoice with those that rejoice. And he has expressed his peculiar displeasure against those who are so attached to their idle pursuits and sinful amusements, as to be totally callous and insensible to the sufferings of others. "Wo to them that are at ease in Zion; that put far away the evil day; that chant to the sound of the viol, that drink wine in bowls, but

they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." There is not a more universal mark of human depravity, than the want of universal sympathy and compassion towards the afflicted, the grieved and broken-hearted sufferers in this vale of tears. Man is continually going to his long home, and the mourners are continually going about the streets; and yet how seldom do they excite a tear or a sigh from those who are putting far away the evil day, and saying that to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant!

6. Since God has ordained this to be a troublesome world, and all are born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward, they ought to live in the habitual exercise of submission to the sovereign hand of God. He has made the world for himself, he governs it for himself, and in the course of providence he is continually counteracting the desires, defeating the designs, disappointing the hopes, and wounding the hearts of mankind, for the sake of promoting his own glory, and the greatest good of his intelligent creatures. They, therefore, ought to bow their wills to his, and cordially submit to all the burdens and afflictions which he sees necessary to cause them to experience. This is the most reasonable and most constant duty of life. Nothing can be more reasonable than cordial submission to all the troubles, afflictions, bereavements, and sorrows, that an infinitely wise God sees it reasonable to inflict. As God has good reasons for all the evils he inflicts upon the sinful children of men, so there is always a good reason why they should be cordially submissive to his disposing will. Submission is an every-day duty, because of every-day troubles. But perhaps of all duties, this is the most difficult to perform, and of course most frequently neglected; which argues the great stupidity and depravity of mankind in this troublesome and trying state.

7. Since God has made this a troublesome world to all who live in it, it highly concerns all who live in it to be truly religious. The afflicted always feel the need of religion, and of that religion which is sincere and genuine. Though men in prosperity cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God, and in their hearts say unto him, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" yet when they come into great trouble, affliction, and sorrow, they find their want of that peace and support which the world cannot give, and which God only can bestow upon those who exercise true submission. But none can exercise true submission without a truly holy heart. It concerns the high and the low, the rich and the poor, and the young as well as the aged, to give their hearts to God, and renounce this troublesome world, as the source of happiness.

Now let me ask all, what effect this troublesome world has had upon you? What effect has it had upon you who have lived the longest in it?

What upon you who have enjoyed the most in it?

What upon you who have suffered the most in it?

What upon you who are mourning the loss of an only daughter, and an only sister? You have enjoyed prosperity, and are now suffering adversity. Your situation is trying and critical. God is now trying you not only for time, but for eternity. Your duty is plain and indispensable. You must submit, or eventually sink and perish.

# SERMON XXIII.

## DEATH IN EARLY LIFE.

NOVEMBER 21, 1824.

And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat upon her knees till noon, and then died. — 2 Kings, iv. 20.

There was something very remarkable in the character and conduct of the parents of this child, and in the circumstances which attended the child from its birth to its death. They appear to have been pious persons, and very fond of pious company, especially of the company of the prophet Elisha, whom they treated with peculiar respect. The prophet was not unmindful of their tokens of regard, but felt a strong desire to remunerate them for their kindness. He first proposed to recommend them to the king, or to some of his favorites; but this proposal did not meet their wishes. After much deliberation, he finally determined to recommend them to God, and interceded with him to bestow upon them a child, which they had long desired. At the time predicted, the child was born, and every thing served to endear it to its parents. But "when he was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father in the field. And he said to his father, my head, my head. And he said to a lad, carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat upon her knees till noon, and then died." In the morning, the fond parents beheld their only and amiable child in health and vivacity, but in a few hours after they stood around it, a pale, lifeless corpse. It is easier to conceive than to describe the extreme anguish of their hearts under this sudden and severe frown of providence. There is hardly any part of God's conduct more dark or mysterious, than his so often bereaving parents of their young and

tender offspring. It seems strange that he should bring rational and immortal creatures into this state of probation, and then call them out of time into eternity, before they are capable of knowing their Creator, or the world in which they live, or the end for which they were created. Those who are destined to such an early death seem not to live or die for themselves or for their Maker. But we must suppose the Father of spirits has some wise and important purposes to answer by the life and the death of children and youth. Accordingly it is the design of the present discourse to inquire why God cuts off so many of the human race in the morning of life. And here I shall,

I. Inquire what proportion of mankind die before they come to years of maturity. And,

II. Inquire what purposes we may suppose God designs to answer, by bereaving parents of their children so early in life.

I. Let us inquire what proportion of mankind die before they arrive to years of maturity. A great deal of pains has been taken to gain information on this point. Not only pastors of churches and congregations, but many other men of learning and leisure have been careful to keep accurate bills of mortality in parishes, towns and cities. They have compared such bills of mortality, and endeavored to form as just an estimate as possible, of the proportion of mankind that die in the first, second, and every year of life, to the most advanced age of man. It is to be supposed that the most accurate bills of mortality must be very different in different nations, and in different parts of the same nation. And it is to be supposed that the calculations founded upon the accounts which different men have had opportunities of examining, must be considerably different. Hence authors, who have published on the subject, have formed different estimates of the proportion of the human race that die in the early stages of life. In New England, it is estimated that more than half die before they arrive at twenty. It is estimated that, in other countries, more than half die before they are seventeen years old. But a celebrated European physician tells us, that according to the most accurate calculation, taking the whole world together, more than half of the human race die before they are eight years old. If this be true, what an immense number of mankind are called out of the world while they are mere infants and little children! And if we consult observation and experience, we must be convinced that infancy and childhood are the most dangerous stages of human life. Where do we find a numerous family of children, who all live and grow up to maturity? Such instances are extremely rare. There is indeed here and there a

family of children, whose parents have the singular favor of seeing them all live and grow up from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, and from youth to years of full maturity and usefulness. But do we not find as many parents whose whole families are cut down, like tender flowers, in the morning of life? We are not, however, to form our estimate of the mortality of children from either of these extraordinary cases. Let us, therefore, attend to what is more common. Parents in general bury some of their children in infancy or childhood. It appears from all the evidence which this subject admits of, that a much larger proportion of mankind die in infancy, childhood and youth, than in any other periods of human life; and that God generally removes some of their children, when their death will pierce their hearts with the most pungent sorrow and distress. This mode of God's conduct appears strange to all, and especially to those who have been called to part with their children just as they began to gain their fondest affections, and raise their most flattering hopes. It seems as though God might answer much more important purposes, and prevent many more evils and calamities among mankind, if he should destine the largest proportion of them to die in old age, and appoint but a very few, if any, to die an early death. But God's conduct constrains us to believe, that more wise and benevolent purposes may be answered by calling millions and millions of the human race into eternity when nothing but their death can be of any apparent service to the world. This leads us to inquire,

II. What purposes God may design to answer by the early death of children. Though there is no reason to doubt whether God has some wise and good purpose to promote by cutting short the lives of so many of mankind; yet it is not to be supposed that we can discover all the reasons which influence the kind Parent of the universe in bereaving fathers and mothers of their young and lovely children. But some of his purposes in such dispensations of providence, which are plain and obvious, I will distinctly mention. And,

1. He may intend, by taking away so many at an early age, to make this appear as a dying world. Though he has told us in his word that it is appointed unto all men once to die, and that dust they are and unto dust they must return, yet these declarations generally fail of making mankind realize their frail and mortal state. The eye affects the heart, and the bare sight of death makes a deeper impression on the minds of the living, than any human or even divine declarations concerning it. The frequency of death seems necessary to keep up a lively sense of it in the minds of dying

creatures. A very dying time we know is always very alarming to the living. And by so many deaths of the young, God makes it appear to all, that they live in a dying world and are dying creatures. The frequent instances of mortality, not only from year to year, but from month to month, and from week to week, make it appear that death is continually carrying mankind to their long home, and causing mourners to go about the streets. If it be necessary, then, that the world should appear as a dying world, what wiser course could God take to produce this solemn and instructive appearance, than to cut off such a large proportion of mankind in their earliest days? To cut off the same number of adult persons, who are busily employed in the active scenes of life, would be much more embarrassing to all the great concerns and affairs of the world. Infants and little children can be much better spared, than those in any of the middle stages of life. It seems to be a point of wisdom and goodness in the sovereign Lord of life, that he so often bereaves the world of its youngest inhabitants, to read a solemn lecture to the rest, that they are born to die. The continual stream of mortality is daily wringing the hearts of thousands, and plunging them in the depths of sorrow. Where are the parents, who have not, at one time or another, been clad in mourning for the death of their dear little ones? And where is the family of children, who have not seen one or more of their little brothers or sisters laid in the sable coffin and lonely grave? Thus God is teaching parents and others, by the death of little children, that this is a dying world, and that they are dying creatures. He seals these instructions by scenes and objects which they never can forget.

2. God may design by the great mortality of children, to teach mankind his sovereign right to take away any temporal favors he has bestowed upon them. They are very apt to consider their children as their own property, and their own most precious property. They value them more than all their other earthly enjoyments, and claim a higher right to them. They possess many things which they do not consider as their own. They dwell in houses and cultivate lands which are not their own. They borrow many comforts and conveniences from one another; but their children they hold by a stronger claim, and practically deny human or divine right to take them away. But they ought to consider, that God has given them these desirable objects and precious blessings, and therefore, that he has an original and sovereign right to do what he will with his own. This is a matter of so much importance, that God may, with propriety, take the most effectual method to display his sovereignty. And we can hardly conceive of any

more effectual way to make mankind see, and feel, and acknowledge his sovereignty, than his stripping them of those blessings which they are most apt to claim, most apt to prize, and most reluctant to part with. By going into their families, and tearing from them the objects which lie nearest to their hearts, he gives them the most sensible and affecting evidence, that he has a right to dispose of them and of all they have. The loss of children was the heaviest of Job's afflictions, and most effectually bowed his heart in cordial submission to divine sovereignty. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Children would be the last things in the world that parents could part with, if they could preserve them from death; but these are often the first things that God sees fit to take away after they have come upon the stage of life. And he does this, to make them realize through the remainder of their days, that they and theirs are in his hand, as the clay is in the hand of the potter.

3. God may design by the death of some little children, to take them away from the evil to come, and give them cause to adore his sovereign goodness in early and safely conducting them to his heavenly kingdom. We are told that God sometimes takes away the godly from the evil to come; and why may he not do the same by some who die in infancy and childhood? He may know that some children would live in such places, be educated in such families, and be exposed to such dangers, snares and temptations, as would be their ruin if they lived; and may therefore in mercy to them cut short their days by an early and happy death. Many parents intend, if their children live, to educate them as the British nobleman educated his son, for this world only. They intend to educate them for time and not for eternity. They mean to give them no other ornaments than such as they imagine will recommend them to the world, and make them shine and prosper in the present life. God knows their designs, and delivers the poor little creatures out of their destructive hands, and deals infinitely better with them than their fond but unwise parents would have done. What signal monuments of divine mercy will such little ones be in the kingdom of glory! And how much reason will they have, to praise God for their early death! Such an end is worthy of God to propose in taking away the young and tender offspring of high and low, rich and poor, who do not intend to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

4. God may design, by the death of little children, to moderate the affections of their parents towards them. They are extremely prone to love their children too much. Jacob was

too fond of Joseph and Benjamin. David was too fond of Absalom. Aaron and Eli were too fond of their sons. And parents in general are too fond of their children. And sometimes they are partial in their affections, and dote upon some son or daughter, who has the more promising appearance or talents. Now, God knows the feelings of parents better than they do themselves, and there is reason to think that he often takes away some of their darlings, to teach them to moderate their affections towards them that survive. They never know how much they value their children, until some of them are removed from them by the heavy stroke of death. Then they have an opportunity to know where they have been leaning, and upon what they have been doting. And it is not uncommon, perhaps, for parents, after having been bereaved of a darling child, to feel quite differently towards their rising family, and to place much less dependence upon them, than they did before. They see their folly and error, in fixing their hearts and placing their dependence upon such frail and fading flowers. It is certain, however, that the death of little children is directly suited to moderate their undue affections towards their rising families, and dispose them to hold themselves in constant readiness to resign their children into the hands of God, whenever he shall call for them.

5. God may intend by the death of children, to prevent parents from being too much engaged to provide for them in this life. Their great fondness for them often creates a worldly spirit, and an anxiety to lay up for them rich and large possessions. They are ready to think that they cannot do too much for them. They give themselves no rest, but employ their time and exhaust their strength and expose their own lives, for the sake of putting their children into the most easy and flourishing situation. Whether they have larger or smaller families, or only one dear child, they are equally solicitous to amass a large portion of worldly wealth for those whom they expect to leave behind, but who may go before them into eternity. To prevent or restrain parents from indulging this sinful spirit, God often removes the objects which are the occasion of their undue regard and exertions. In how many instances has God treated the rich and the poor in this manner! And in how many instances has such a sore dispensation of providence apparently answered the desirable and designed effect! How many parents, by losing their children, have lost their unhallowed zeal and engagedness in the pursuit of worldly objects! By this means, they have been brought to view the world in a true light, as vain, for themselves and for theirs. The means, in this case, are properly adapted to the end, and the end entirely jus-

tifies the means. Those who are teachable under such dispensations, will acknowledge the wisdom and goodness of God in using such painful means, to teach them a lesson which nothing else could teach them.

6. God may bereave parents of some of their children, on purpose to teach them to do their duty to the rest. So long as parents have high expectations of their children's living, they are apt to neglect to prepare them for dying; but when God takes away one or more of their children, by an early death, then they can hardly fail to realize that they are all mortal, and may be called out of time into eternity before they are prepared for the solemn and interesting event; which makes them feel, that it is of more importance to prepare their children for dying than for living. The duty of parents to give their children a pious and religious education is one of the greatest duties that is ever devolved upon them; and yet it is a duty which, above all others, they are in most danger of neglecting. God, therefore, often finds it necessary to teach them this duty by the bereaving and correcting rod of his wrath. He causes them to know by experience, that it is an evil and bitter thing to themselves, as well as to their children, to neglect the duty which he has expressly enjoined upon them, to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. When he calls their children out of time into eternity, where they may be happy or wretched beyond conception, they are constrained to follow them in their thoughts, and with all their tender feelings, where they are gone, and to mourn or rejoice according to their hopes or fears of their eternal state. This is calculated to awaken all their parental feelings, and give them a proper direction towards their spared children; and to excite them to take a proper care of the young and immortal souls confided to their trust. We have reason to believe, therefore, that when God bereaves parents of some of their children, and spares others, that it is one purpose of his, to admonish them of the great duty of devoting their children to and of bringing them up for himself. He takes away one to save another.

7. God may bereave pious parents of their young and tender offspring, in order to try and purify their hearts. This seems to have been the primary purpose of God, in taking away for a time the child of the Shunammites. Every circumstance was directly suited to try the hearts of those professed friends of God. They were not fond of the world. They were amiable and exemplary persons, and much engaged in religion, and warmly attached to its friends. But it is probable that they idolized their only child. Accordingly God meant to take away their idol, try their sincerity, and recall

their supreme affections to himself. It was very ungrateful in them to love the gift more than the giver; to give that place in their affections to their child, which God once filled, and ought always to have filled. It was no less kind than wise in God, to give them a fair opportunity of exercising and manifesting unfeigned submission and supreme affection to himself, under a clear view of his awful and amiable sovereignty. God treated Job in the same manner, for the same purpose of trying his faith, and love, and submission, and of teaching the world that all real saints love him better than sons or daughters, or any earthly enjoyments. And we may well suppose, that when God bereaves pious parents of their children, he means to try their hearts, and give them an opportunity of displaying before the eyes of the world the beauties of holiness. I may add,

8. That another reason why God sometimes bereaves parents of their little children, is because he intends to make their bereavement the means of their own conversion. Such sensible and severe strokes of Providence have led thoughtless, careless, and prayerless parents, to attend to the things of their everlasting peace. And if we may rely on the account that parents often give of their conversion, we may conclude that God does, in a great many instances, make use of the death of children, to convert their unconverted parents. Those who make a profession of religion, frequently ascribe their first serious impressions to the afflictive and bereaving hand of God in taking away from their hearts and arms the dearest objects of their affections. Those who come upon the stage of life with high hopes of worldly prosperity, stand in peculiar need of being taught its vanity. And to bear the yoke in their youth, by the loss of children, is adapted in a peculiar manner to blast their hopes, and turn their attention from the world to God, and to prepare them to meet God in all the future dispensations of his providence. It is therefore one of his gracious purposes, in bereaving young parents of their young children, to prepare them to embrace the gospel, and to devote themselves and their children to him, without the least reserve.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If so great a proportion of mankind die in childhood and youth, as has been stated, then all adult persons have great reason of gratitude for the preservation of life. It is because they have obtained help from God, that they continue unto this day among the living. Those who have arrived to the

age of twenty-one, have lived to bury almost half of mankind; and among others they have buried fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and some of their nearest and dearest connections. Those who have arrived to the age of forty-five, have buried nearly three quarters of mankind; those who have reached seventy years, have buried more than three quarters of their contemporaries; and those whose lives have been protracted to eighty or ninety years, can scarcely find a contemporary in the world. This last class of the superannuated are a wonder to many, and especially to themselves. When they look back, and recollect how many different scenes they have passed through, how many dangers, accidents and diseases they have escaped, and how many mercies have followed them all their days, they have abundant reason to say, with the warmest gratitude, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed!" Of all men in the world, some of the aged, perhaps, have the most reason to bless God for his sparing and distinguishing goodness. But innumerable others are under the same kind, though not the same degree of obligation to gratitude and praise, to the Former of their bodies and the Father of their spirits, for carrying them in the arms of his providence, and preserving their lives so long in this dying world. The man of seventy, the man of forty-five, and the man of twenty-one, can ascribe it to nothing but the mere unmerited mercy of God, that he has survived so many that have fallen on his right hand and left. How many aged has he followed to the grave, and how many infants, children and youths has he seen laid in the dust! By all the deaths you have seen, and by all the visible dangers you have escaped, God has been telling you, in a manner more impressive than words, that you are born to die, that the grave is your house, and eternity your long home; and can it be that it is still your inward thought that your houses and your lives shall continue for ever, and that you shall never see corruption? Can any justify it to themselves, that when they have eyes, they will not see; that when they have ears to hear, they will not hear; and that when they have eternal interests at stake, they will not feel? Among all the creatures of God, mankind, in this dying world and probationary state, are in the most dangerous condition. Here it depends on their choice, whether they shall gain eternal good, or lose eternal good, or suffer eternal misery. And the day of death, which may come suddenly and unexpectedly, will convey them to the mansions of heaven, or to the regions of darkness and despair. It infinitely concerns them to prepare for death and eternity before they close their eyes upon this world, and open them in that world

from whence they shall never return. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

2. If God so often takes away infants and little children by death, then those parents have peculiar reason for gratitude to God, who have never suffered a single breach in their young and rising families. There are some such highly favored parents, who have never been called to see any of their dear children in the agonies of death; but have the great and singular satisfaction to see them living and flourishing, like olive plants, around their table. A family of children may be an increasing source of happiness to parents while they live, when they die, and after they are dead; but houses and lands, and all other worldly enjoyments, are continually fading and diminishing by the ravages of time, and become useless at death. Children may be growing into usefulness and importance after their parents are laid in the dust, who may anticipate the good they may do and enjoy, before they meet them in eternity. It is, therefore, an unspeakable favor to parents, that their children are spared, and may live to be a continued and increasing comfort to them, both before and after they leave the world. But how many parents are ungrateful to God for the peculiar favor of sparing the lives of their children. They neither give them to God, nor are willing that they should give themselves to God. They wish to see them live, and grow rich and great in the world, instead of renouncing the world and the things of the world, and serving God and their generation, and preparing for a happy death and a blessed immortality beyond the grave. As children may be the greatest source of earthly comfort to parents, so they may be the greatest source of sorrow and grief to parents, both in time and eternity. It depends, in a great measure, upon parents themselves, whether the spared lives of their children shall prove a source of joy or sorrow to them before and after their own death. If they would consult their own and their children's temporal and spiritual good, let them do their duty to their children, that they may do their duty to them, and to God. The goodness of God calls upon them, in the most endearing manner, to instruct, correct, and restrain their children early and properly. If they neglect this important duty, they have reason to fear that God will either take them out of their hands, or preserve them as a rod to chastise them for their criminal ingratitude and negligence.

3. If God so often and so early takes away children from their parents, then it is of very serious importance that parents should be truly religious. Graceless parents are unfit to do their duty to their children while they live, and equally unfit to

do their duty to God, when he takes them away. As soon as any become parents, the lives and souls of their children are committed to their trust. Their natural affections generally induce them to take care of their lives and health, whether they are religious or irreligious. But if they have no true love to God, they will have no true love to the souls of their children, and of course will neither give them to God, nor instruct them in duty, nor restrain them from walking in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes. It is of the most solemn consequence, therefore, that parents should give their hearts to God and their children to him. For without vital piety they are unprepared to glorify God, if he should bereave them of their children, by true submission to his correcting hand. Or if he should spare the lives of their children, they are totally disqualified to discharge the important and self-denying duties they owe to them, as well as to themselves. It is a melancholy consideration, that there are so many parents who are living without religion in their hearts, and without the practice of it in their families, and totally neglect to prepare themselves and their children for living or dying. Though they wish to shut God out of their hearts and out of their houses, yet he can send death into their windows, to strip them of the dear objects of their affections, and blast all their earthly hopes and prospects; and what ground have they to expect that they shall escape the marks of his just displeasure? He can cause either prosperity or adversity to destroy both them and their children. Evil pursueth sinners, and will certainly sooner or later overtake them, unless they repent and reform. And is it not high time that there should be a thorough reformation in irreligious families? How numerous are such families at present! And how rapidly are they multiplying! What reason is there to hope that children will be reformed, if their parents are not? What reason is there to expect that children will read the Bible, if their parents neglect it; or that children will pray, if their parents neglect it; or that children will attend public worship, if their parents neglect it; or that children will keep the Sabbath, if their parents neglect it; or that children will reverence the name of God, if their parents profane it; or that children will avoid any evil courses which their parents pursue? How great, then, is the necessity and importance of younger parents especially, becoming pious, and walking within their houses with a perfect and upright heart, and giving their children a pious education! They are continually liable to mortal diseases and fatal accidents. Can you neglect to pray for them? You do neglect to pray for them, so long as you neglect to pray for yourselves. Your neglect of your own souls is alarming.

It presages your own ruin, and the ruin of generations yet to come.

4. If God may answer many wise and benevolent purposes by the death of little children, then those who are lamenting the sudden and surprising death of their lovely and only child,* ought to be cordially submissive to the bereaving and afflictive hand of God. They have no ground to complain that there is no sorrow like unto their sorrow, for death has reigned over little children from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to this day. Millions of parents in every age have been called to suffer the loss of their young and tender offspring, and every day and every where the hearts of parents are bleeding under the bereaving hand of God. How often have parents been called to see their dear little ones struck dead by lightning; or drowned in deep waters; or consumed to ashes in a burning house; or scorched to death by accidental and inextinguishable flames! All these are awful and heart-affecting circumstances of death; but at the same time they signally display the holy and sovereign hand of God. It highly becomes the present mourners to say to God as David did, "I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." He who gave them their child, had a right to take her away at what time and in what manner he pleased. The Judge of all the earth has done right, and it only remains for them to feel and conduct right, and all will be well. They have no ground to murmur, when God has had so many reasons to afflict them, and can answer so many valuable purposes by it. He may convince them of their ingratitude for preserving their own lives so long, and for the gift of the child he has taken from them. He may convince them of their neglect of giving up themselves and their child to him. He may teach them their own frailty and mortality, and lead them to cordial submission to his amiable and awful sovereignty in the dispensations of providence and grace. He may prepare them, by bearing the yoke in the morning of life, for all future duties, trials, and events. And if he should teach them all these important lessons of instruction, they will have reason and be disposed to say, that it has been good for them to have been bereaved and sorely afflicted. If their hearts are tender and teachable, they will certainly find peculiar benefit from their present heavy trials; but if they refuse submission, and consequently refuse to be comforted, they will add weight to their affliction, and give it a tendency to harden, stupify, and destroy. Their situation calls for immediate attention and submission on

* A child of Mr. Seneca Hill.

their part, and for sympathy and compassion on the part of others.

5. This subject calls upon all to inquire whether the bereavements and afflictions they have experienced have been instructive and beneficial to them. You have all been born to trouble, in childhood, youth, and riper years, and you are ready to imagine you have had your proportion, if not more than your proportion, of the common evils, calamities, and troubles of life. The serious question now is, what instructions and benefits you have derived from them. Have they taught you to give your hearts and lives and all you have to God? Have they taught you the vanity of all earthly hopes and prospects, and led you to secure the one thing needful? Have they taught you, while young, to love and obey your parents? Have they taught you, since you became parents, to maintain the spirit and the forms of religion? Have they taught you to do your duty to your children, to give them up to and bring them up for God? Have they taught you to instruct, to correct, and to restrain your children from every evil and false way? Have they taught you to close your doors on the Sabbath, and on other days, against all corrupt and corrupting company? Have they taught you to attend, and to cause all under your care and influence to attend, public worship? Have you instructed, and given opportunity to others to instruct, your children in the first principles of the oracles of God? If your bereavements or other afflictions have taught you these things, they have not been lost upon you, but have been very instructive and beneficial to you. But if they have not instructed you in respect to these important duties, nor disposed you to a faithful discharge of them, you have been very dull and inattentive scholars in the school of adversity, and have reason to fear, that those whom you have neglected to teach and restrain will sooner or later give you very painful, and not very profitable instruction. Stupidity and negligence under the afflictive and instructive dispensations of Providence seldom fail to produce visible and sorrowful effects.

6. This subject now calls upon all to prepare for death. You have heard and seen that this is a dying world, and that you are dying creatures. Death is continually coming to infants, to little children, to youth, and to all persons in every stage of life. Though children have outlived infancy, yet they have not outlived mortality. Though youth have outlived little children, yet they have not outlived mortality. Though young men have outlived youth, yet they have not outlived mortality. Though one aged person has outlived another, yet the oldest person has not outlived mortality. Death is on his way to

meet the infant, the child, the youth, the young man, and the old man. Which of these persons, in the different stages of life, he will meet first, none can tell. Who then has a right to say to himself, I shall not be the first? No child has a right to say, that he shall live to youth. No youth has a right to say, that he shall live to manhood. No middle-aged man has a right to say, that he shall live to old age; and the oldest person has no right to say, that he shall not be the first to meet death. But do not the aged often reason like children, that because they have lived so long, they shall live longer; or like youth, that because they have lived so long, they shall live longer; or like young men, that because they have lived so long, they shall live longer? This is a fallacious and dangerous way of thinking and reasoning on the awful subject of death. It has probably ruined the souls of thousands. Since the grave is without any order, and death may be as near to the child as to the youth, and as near to the youth as to the young man, and as near to the young man as to the old, every one ought to be prepared to meet death first. Should the question be put to the aged, Are you ready to meet death first? what would you say? Were the question put to the young man, Are you ready to meet death first? what would you say? Were the question put to the youth, Are you ready to meet death first? what would you say? Or were the question put to the child, Are you prepared to meet death first? he would in the simplicity of his heart say, No. And he would have the best excuse for his negligence. The mouth of every other unprepared person would be stopped. Will you any longer live a self-condemned life, and stand exposed to a self-condemned and eternal death? You have no excuse for past neglect, and no just ground to hope for the farther forbearance and patience of God.

# SERMON XXIV.

## RIGHT CONDUCT UNDER THE SMILES AND FROWNS OF GOD.

FUNERAL OF MRS. LONG, WIFE OF REV. DAVID LONG, OF MILFORD, JULY 2, 1804.

THE Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. — JOB, i. 21.

GOD bereaved and afflicted Job not merely for his own benefit, but for the general benefit of mankind. He visited him with a complication of the heaviest calamities that ever fell to the lot of any one man. Under these severe afflictions he discovered a keen sensibility, and at the same time displayed the most cordial and unlimited submission. His views and feelings under his extreme sufferings are a mirror, in which all the afflicted may clearly see how they ought to feel and act under the correcting hand of God. As soon as he knew that his bitter cup of the wormwood and the gall was filled up, he prostrated himself before his heavenly Father, and by the most significant tokens, expressed a tender, filial, submissive spirit. He rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." These words, without any comment, suggest this serious truth for our present consideration:

That it becomes men both to acknowledge and to bless God, under the smiles and frowns of providence.

I shall first show, that it becomes men to acknowledge God under the smiles and frowns of providence; and then show that it becomes them to bless him under both.

I. We are to consider, that men ought to acknowledge God under the smiles and frowns of providence.

God is the creator, preserver, and governor of all things. He rules in the kingdoms of nature, providence, and grace. He causes all the revolutions of the sun, moon, and stars, and all the motions and changes which take place in the earth. He controls all the views, purposes, and actions of men. No good nor evil can come to them, but under his direction, and by virtue of his influence. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Neither doth affliction come forth of the dust, nor doth trouble spring out of the ground. "Is there evil in the city, saith the prophet, and the Lord hath not done it?" Yea, God himself claims the prerogative of sending good and evil upon mankind, according to his own sovereign pleasure. "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." God always sends good and evil according to his original purpose and appointment. And for this reason he says to the afflicted, "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." Since God guides all the wheels of providence, and governs all secondary causes, all good and evil are to be traced up to his holy, wise, powerful, righteous and sovereign hand. He is to be acknowledged as the dispenser of all the good and evil which mankind experience through all the stages and vicissitudes of life. Neither mercies nor afflictions come to them by chance, but are sent by God, who has a right to give, or deny, or take away, as seemeth good in his sight. Accordingly, good men have always looked through secondary causes in the dispensations of providence, and ascribed the good they enjoyed, and the evils they suffered, to the hand and heart of God. Though Job knew that his great prosperity had been in a measure owing to his own care, activity, and diligence, and to the labor and pains of his servants, and to the aid and assistance of his fellow men, yet he acknowledges that God made him rich, and gave him all the good things he had enjoyed. And though he knew that Satan and wicked men had been concerned in slaying his flocks, and herds, and servants, yet he ascribes all his calamities to the agency of the first and supreme Cause of all things. He says, without a single exception, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." And again he says, with peculiar sensibility and tenderness, "Have pity, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me." Joseph, in reviewing both the adversity and prosperity which he had experienced through the

astonishing scenes he had passed, ascribes them all to the overruling hand of God. He sent me before you, says he to his brethren, to preserve life, and has made me ruler over all the land of Egypt. Thus it becomes all men to acknowledge God in all the good and evil they experience, whether he gives, denies, or takes away, with or without the instrumentality of second causes. For God is as really and constantly concerned in ordering the circumstances and condition of one person as another. And it can be owing to nothing but criminal stupidity, or infidelity, that any overlook the hand of God in what they suffer, or enjoy. The prophet reproves Belshazzar for his disregard to the care, protection, and goodness of his Creator. "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." Whether men are rich or poor; whether they are prosperous or unprosperous; whether they are in health or sickness; whether their friends, relatives and connections are spared or taken away; they ought to acknowledge the hand of God in all his dispensations towards them. And this acknowledgment implies something more than a mere speculative belief that all the good and evil that falls to their lot comes through the overruling hand of God. Multitudes are willing to say in words, and they believe what they say, that God governs the world, and directs all events, prosperous and adverse; and yet neither realize nor love this most interesting truth. They feel and act, rejoice or mourn, hope or fear, as though God were not in all their thoughts. But Job realized and approved of the divine agency under his afflictions. He felt and enjoyed this consoling and humiliating truth. He said, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" And again he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." He felt himself to be in the hand of God, as the clay is in the hand of the potter. And thus it becomes all men to acknowledge with deep sensibility, that it is God who gives or takes away their comforts and enjoyments, and who raises them up, or casts them down, by his holy and sovereign hand. Nor is this all. For,

II. They ought to bless as well as acknowledge God, under both the smiles and frowns of providence. Job acknowledged that God had given and taken away, and then adds what was still more important, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." He blessed God in taking away, as well as in granting divine favors, though the taking away was extremely painful and distressing. And in this it is said, "he sinned not," but felt and conducted perfectly right. He ought to have blessed God under both the smiles and frowns of providence. And what

was his duty in his situation, is the duty of the bereaved and afflicted, in all other similar cases. For,

1. God never takes away any favors from mankind but what he meant to take away when he gave them. It is true, he does not inform the subjects of his mercies how long he intends to continue, or how soon he intends to take away his favors; but he always determines in his own mind, before he bestows any blessing, how long that blessing shall continue, and whether it shall or shall not be removed during life. As he always has some purpose to answer by every good gift, so when that good gift has answered the purpose for which it was given, he takes it away, and not before. So that he acts from the same benevolent motive in taking away, as in bestowing favors. Could we see his motives in giving, we could see his motives in taking away; and of course could see the same goodness in taking away, as in giving. He never bestows the least favor upon any individual of the human race, without weighing the consequences of giving, nor, if he means to take it away, without weighing the consequences of taking it away. He always gives and takes away after the counsel of his own will, or his original designs, which like himself, are perfectly holy, just and good. If mankind have reason to bless God for giving, in any instance, they have the same reason to bless him for taking away what he has given. This is always true in respect to God, though not always true in respect to men. They may have better motives in giving, than in taking away. They may give in kindness, but take away in unkindness. But the kind Parent of the universe never treats his creatures so. He gives and takes away from precisely the same benevolent motives. And this is a good reason why mankind should bless God under both the smiles and frowns of providence.

2. It becomes men to bless God in taking away, as well as in giving peculiar favors, because the favors he continues are generally more numerous and more important than those he removes. Life itself is paramount to all other earthly favors; for were they all taken away but that, that alone would overbalance all the losses and bereavements that could be sustained. Hence the prophet demands, "Wherefore should a living man complain?" But God generally spares far more than he takes away, and mixes innumerable mercies with his judgments. The mercies he bestows and continues are clear manifestations of his kindness to the afflicted, and demonstrate that he does not willingly afflict or grieve them. If he meant to treat them unkindly, he would strip them of all their comforts and enjoyments. But his mercy always rejoices against judgment, which ought to convince them that he is

more ready to give, than to take away. This ought to fill their hearts with gratitude, and cause them to bless the Lord at all times. For they always have reason to feel and say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

3. The afflicted always know that whatever personal evils God brings upon them, he constantly seeks the general good of the universe; and that all the sufferings they endure are calculated and designed to answer that wise and benevolent purpose. All personal evils and calamities are intended and suited to promote the general good, whether they do or do not promote the private personal good of the sufferers. Job's calamities, which were designed for his good, were no less designed for the benefit of thousands in all future ages. They have been, are now, and will be instructive and consoling to multitudes, who have heard and will hear of his sufferings and patience. Abraham's trial was designed not only for his good, but for the good of the children of Abraham from generation to generation, even to the end of time. The series of calamities inflicted on the murmuring Israelites have answered and will answer important purposes to the world in general, from age to age. God makes use of individuals to teach and to warn the world, by their conduct under his chastising hand. And the afflicted may always remember, whether they do or shall receive benefit from their own afflictions, the world certainly will. God is aiming at a good end in afflicting them, and this end he will certainly accomplish, whatever becomes of them. And ought they not to bless him, for seeking an end which is superior to their personal good, whether that be secured or lost, by his smiles or frowns upon them? The consideration that God is constantly and ultimately pursuing the highest happiness of the whole intelligent creation is a weighty reason for blessing and praising him in the darkest seasons, and under the heaviest public or private calamities. The primitive christians esteemed it a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ, and the benefit of the world. And why should not men now consider it a privilege to suffer for the good of the world? When God afflicts or bereaves, he implicitly says to the afflicted and bereaved, do you now teach your fellow men how to feel and conduct under the evils and calamities of life. Be an example of suffering affliction, and improve the opportunities I give you to promote the best interests of mankind, which is my supreme aim in laying my heavy hand on you.

4. The afflicted and bereaved have often reason to bless God, because the evils they are suffering are so much lighter than

those that many others have suffered, and are suffering. They are apt to think and say, there is no sorrow like unto our sorrow. Let them only look into the Bible, and read the history of God's conduct towards nations and individuals, and they will see reason to believe that their own trials, and afflictions, and bereavements, are light indeed, when compared with those recorded in the eleventh of Hebrews, and in other parts of scripture. Or let them look around them, and they can hardly fail to find one and another pressed down with heavier burdens and severer afflictions, than they have been called to endure. And when they see this discrimination in their favor, to what can they ascribe it, but to the mere mercy of him who punishes them much less than they deserve? But,

5. There is another reason why men should always bless God under both the smiles and frowns of providence; and that is, because this is the only way to make all his dealings towards them eventually work together for their good. There is an infallible connection between their feeling and acting right under divine corrections, and their receiving spiritual and everlasting benefit from them. Abraham, Jacob and Job derived great spiritual benefit from their singular and severe sufferings and bereavements. David found it to be good for him that he had been afflicted. Afflictions as well as mercies are suited to promote the personal benefit of the subjects of them, if they only wisely and properly improve them. If they are submissive under the frowns, as well as thankful under the smiles of Providence, they express that pure love to God to which the promise is made, "that all things shall work together for their good." The great accuser of the brethren insinuated that Job loved God merely for his favors, and would curse him to his face, if he afflicted and bereaved him of what he had given. Accordingly God put Job's sincerity to the test, and he endured the trial; for he blessed God under his frowns as well as under his smiles. And by such a tender, teachable, filial and submissive spirit, he turned the frowns as well as smiles of God to his own present and future good. This then is the way and only way of deriving certain and saving benefit from all the dispensations of Providence. Hence it becomes the afflicted and bereaved to bless God in their present situation. They have no occasion for prying into the counsels of Heaven, or attempting to comprehend the divine purposes. They have only to be still and wait for the salvation of God. If they bless God, he will bless them. God is doing right, and if they will only feel and do right, he will teach them to profit by the best means his infinite wisdom and goodness can use with them. Let every afflicted one follow the example and adopt the language of

Job: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Having briefly illustrated the subject proposed, it now suggests some reflections, which seem to be suitable to the present mournful occasion.

1. This subject suggests the propriety of drawing near to God, and conversing with him under his correcting hand. His providential dealings have a meaning and a voice, which the afflicted ought to hear and understand. The rod of correction has a voice, which calls upon the corrected to draw near to him who has appointed it; and converse with him under the tokens of his displeasure. The afflicted prophet resolved to perform this appropriate duty. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments." It is one design of God in afflicting, to draw the afflicted near to himself, and cause them to realize his great and amiable character, for which they ought to bless him, under his frowns as well as smiles. He said concerning his ancient peculiar people, "I will go and return to my place, until they seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." The afflictions of Job drew him near to God, and inspired him with a holy confidence to converse freely and humbly with him. "Then Job answered and said, Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my speech before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." The providence of God is a comment on his word, and shows him to be what his word declares him to be, "holy in all his ways and righteous in all his works." The sons of God, therefore, ought to draw near to him in days of darkness, to open their ears and hearts to receive instruction and consolation, and to fill their mouths with arguments before the throne of grace.

2. In the view of this subject, we may see the nature of true submission under the afflicting and bereaving hand of God. It is something very different from stupidity and insensibility under divine chastenings. This is not submitting to them, but despising them, which is highly displeasing to God. When he afflicts men, he means they shall feel the smart of his rod; and the more sensibly they feel it, the more they are prepared to exercise true submission; for while they feel no evil they can exercise no submission. The children of God are apt to feel every mark of their Father's displeasure. Nothing gives such an edge to their afflictions, as the consideration of their coming from the hand and heart of their heavenly

Father. Were they mere accidents, or did they come forth of the dust, or spring out of the ground, they would seem comparatively light and supportable. But when they realize that the Father of mercies means to give them pain and distress, they feel not only the rod, but that which is far more grievous, the frowns and displeasure of him who hath appointed it for correction. He formerly complained of some, that though he had smitten them, they received not correction; and though he had stricken them, they grieved not, nor laid it to heart. True submission is not only different from stupidity, but from mere sensibility. The afflicted may feel the weight and see the justice of God's correcting hand, while they are far from being cordially reconciled and submissive to it. We often hear the afflicted say, that God is just, and has done them no wrong, while they inwardly murmur and repine, and are totally destitute of the least degree of true submission. For it is one thing to see and acknowledge the justice of God, and a very different thing to love that justice. Job was truly submissive, and his submission consisted in love to the justice of God. He said from the heart, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He blessed God for his justice, as well as for his goodness; that is, for his taking away, as well as for his giving. This suggests another reflection,

3. That we have as much reason for submission under heavy, as under light afflictions. Some afflictions are great in number, great in kind, great in degree, and great in duration. All these aggravating circumstances united to heighten the afflictions of Job. They were numerous. One affliction followed another in a thick succession, like the waves of the sea, billow after billow, billow after billow, until they seemed to overwhelm the good man. His houses and his flocks are destroyed; his servants and his children are slain; and at length he is tortured with extreme bodily pains. You have heard of the patience of Job in this forlorn situation. Without a murmur or complaint, he said from the heart, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." His submission was unconditional and unlimited. When Samuel delivered the divine messages to Eli concerning the calamities coming on him and his house, his prospects were dark and distressing; but yet he said, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." When David was driven from his house, and from his throne, and from the ark of God, he was involved in great and complicated evils; but still he unreservedly resigned himself into the sovereign hand of God.

"Behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him." These good men had correct ideas of the nature and extent of true submission to divine sovereignty. They saw the same reasons for submission under the heaviest, as under the lightest afflictions. And it becomes all the afflicted at this day, to be followers of them, who through faith, and patience, and submission, inherit the promises.

I hope my dear brother, the respected pastor of this people, will please to apply to himself the thoughts that have been suggested, so far as they appear adapted to his present afflicted and bereaved situation. I know he has been a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief. His serious, devout, contemplative mind, has led him to anticipate, in a measure, the heavy loss which he now feels and laments. He can adopt the language of Job in the day of his adversity: "The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came." But anticipation of trouble and affliction is commonly mingled with hope, which calms the mind, and lightens the weight of the evil feared; and when it comes without hope, it comes with a redoubled weight and pungency. This, those know to be true who have been placed in a similar state of suspense between hope and fear. But be this as it may, God has at last poured out a bitter cup of wormwood and gall to the pastor of this people. He has bereaved him of his nearest and dearest connection in life. He may be allowed to weep. Christ wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus. But he has no reason to mourn as those who have no hope. Mrs. LONG exhibited beautiful marks of virtue and piety. She resembled Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and Elizabeth, the mother of John, who walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. But while her virtue, piety and usefulness, seem to alleviate the sorrows of the bereaved in one view, they equally serve to aggravate them in another view. The more virtuous, pious and useful she was, the greater and more grievous is the loss he has sustained, and the greater is his obligation to exercise cordial and unreserved submission. God knew the value of the blessing he has taken from him. God knew all the conflicts of his mind under such a fiery trial. God knew all the consequences which would flow to him and to his young and rising family, by this bereaving stroke of providence. But he saw good reasons for striking such a heavy and painful stroke. And could he only see all the reasons of God's conduct, he would be fully convinced that God has done nothing but what he ought cordially to approve, and to bless him for. And it

may console him to believe that what he knows not now, he shall know hereafter. He ought at present to be dumb, and not open his mouth, because the Lord has done it. Submission is his present duty, and the best source of present comfort. The happiness which flows from submission is superior to the happiness that can flow from any earthly enjoyment. If he will cast his cares and burdens upon the Lord, he will graciously sustain him. He never had, perhaps, in the course of his life, a better opportunity both to glorify and enjoy God. Affliction is the good man's shining time. Now is the time to set a good example of suffering affliction to his people, and to exhibit the beautiful character of the christian and the minister, and to show the reality and importance of that pure religion which he has long and faithfully preached. Only do this, dear brother, and your light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I heartily sympathize with the young and very promising children of the family, who are bereaved of their dear mother, who bare them upon her heart, devoted them to God, carried them to the throne of divine grace, watched the motions of their hearts, poured pious instructions into their tender minds, and gave them salutary counsels and cautions. They have sustained an irreparable loss, in the most critical period of life. Their father will do all that a father can do for them; and though their mother is gone, has she not left an example which it is their wisdom and duty to follow? And has she not made such impressions on their minds, as they ought never to forget, nor eradicate? It behooves them to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and to avoid every evil and false way. Though their mother has forsaken them, and can do no more for them, yet it is devoutly to be desired and hoped that God will take them up, and guide them in the path to everlasting life.

The aged and respectable mother of the deceased has sorrow upon sorrow, in an evil time when she is least able to bear it, and needs the care and support of her dutiful children, which she will undoubtedly enjoy. But she has learned, we hope, by long and happy experience, to trust in the Lord Jehovah, in whom there is everlasting strength. All her trials on earth are coming to a speedy close, and her path, we trust, is like the rising sun, which shines brighter and brighter to the perfect day. She may be soon absent from the body, and present with the Lord, where all tears will be wiped away. While the surviving brothers feel their heavy loss, they will bow in silent and cordial submission to the afflictive and instructive hand of God.

The religious society in this place must feel themselves deeply affected by the death of Mrs. Long, whom they have had so much reason to esteem and respect. As a christian, she has desired, and in various ways promoted, the peace and prosperity of this people. They have sustained a heavy loss, which calls them to mourning, and silent submission to the bereaving hand of providence. This instance of mortality reads them a solemn lesson on their own frailty and mortality. Their days are numbered, and the bounds are fixed over which they cannot pass. They must soon follow her whom they this day lament, into that world from which she will never return. The day of death cannot be far distant from the aged, and may be much nearer to the young and to those in the meridian of life, than they are ready to expect. It highly concerns all to stand in the posture of servants waiting for the coming of their Lord. Let me say to every one, what the wisest of men has said: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

# SERMON XXV.

## DEPENDENCE ON MAN FORBIDDEN.

JANUARY 22, 1826.

PUT not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. — PSALM cxlvi. 3, 4.

THERE is one great error to which all mankind are extremely liable; and that is, the error of misplacing their confidence. Being naturally weak and insufficient to take care of themselves, they naturally fly to some foreign cause for aid and support. But they generally depend upon a broken reed, which eventually pierces them to the heart. God, therefore, who knows them better than they know themselves, kindly cautions them against such a great practical mistake. He knows their propensity to trust in each other, and seasonably and solemnly bids them to forbear. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." These words convey this melancholy truth:

That mankind are naturally disposed to place that supreme dependence upon each other which God has forbidden. I shall,

I. Show that mankind are naturally disposed to do this.

II. That God has forbidden it. And,

III. Why he has forbidden it.

I. The first thing to be considered is, that mankind are naturally disposed to place undue dependence upon each other. God never gives men unnecessary cautions, nor lays unnecessary restraints upon them. Were they not prone to neglect placing their supreme dependence on his supporting arm, and

to lean upon each other, he would not have given them the prohibition in the text. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." Man is the most dependent creature in the world. He cometh forth like a flower, weak, frail, delicate. He grows up, lives and dies in a state of dependence. In every stage of life, mankind are necessarily dependent on each other. God has ordered it so, that we are obliged to depend upon our fellow men for support, instruction, direction, and the supply of all our wants. In infancy we should have perished, had not the hand and heart of compassion supported and protected us. In youth and riper years, we were indebted to others, to form and enlarge our minds. And through every stage of life we are constrained to lean more or less upon the power, wisdom, and kindness of our fellow men. In this respect, all stand very nearly upon a level. The young depend upon the old, and the old upon the young. The poor depend upon the rich, and the rich upon the poor. The servant depends upon his master, and the master upon the servant. The subject depends upon the ruler, and the ruler upon the subject. The child depends upon its parent, and the parent on the child. Is it strange therefore, that such creatures as we are, in our present state, should depend too much upon each other? We early form this habit, which is constantly strengthening through all the changes and periods of life, and which God originally intended we should form and cultivate. But he never meant that our dependence upon each other, should be a just ground of our renouncing our supreme dependence upon himself. He is the only self-existent and independent being. He carries all other beings in his hand. They can do nothing for themselves, or for one another, without his supporting and guiding influence. And he has given sufficient evidence to all his intelligent creatures, that they are under his supreme control. But though they know that he is the only proper object of their supreme dependence, yet they are extremely apt to renounce their dependence upon him, and to put their highest trust in one another. I proceed to show,

II. That God has forbidden them to do this. For,

1. He has indirectly required them to place their supreme dependence upon himself. He every where in scripture requires them to view him as the supreme object of dependence, and to confide in him as such. We find this duty plainly and abundantly inculcated in the book of Psalms. There we read, "Trust in the Lord, and do good." "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." "Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust." "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him."

"O Israel, trust in the Lord. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord. Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord." Solomon says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart." And Isaiah says, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." Such are the plain and repeated injunctions which God has laid upon mankind to place their supreme trust and confidence in him. And all these injunctions indirectly forbid them to trust supremely in themselves, or in any other created beings. For it is impossible that they should place their supreme trust in themselves or any other dependent creatures, if they place their supreme dependence upon God.

2. God has not only required men to place their supreme confidence in himself, but expressly forbidden them to trust in themselves supremely. "It is better," says David, "to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." And again he says, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth: in that very day his thoughts perish." But we find another more solemn prohibition against trusting in human aid and support, in the seventeenth of Jeremiah. "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Thus God both indirectly and directly forbids mankind to place their supreme dependence upon one another.

It now remains to show,

III. Why God so expressly and solemnly forbids men to place their supreme trust and confidence in themselves. We may presume he sees good reasons for this, whether we can discover them or not. But it is easy to point out some solid reasons why he should warn all men against this great and dangerous error, to which they are so extremely liable.

1. And here the first reason that occurs is, because mankind are so very unfit objects upon which to place supreme dependence. This is suggested in the text. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." All men are mortal. They come into the world under a sentence of death, and they are every day and every where liable to the execution of this solemn sentence. Their lives are short and very uncertain. This David realized and said, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine

age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity." In another psalm he bewails the shortness of man's life before God. "Thou carriest him away as with a flood; they are as a sleep; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth." And again he says, "As for man, his days are as grass; as the flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more." Solomon likewise illustrates the uncertainty of life by a very striking similitude. "Man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Men are continually exposed to both seen and unseen snares and dangers, and never know when nor where they shall breathe their last. But this is certain, when their breath goeth forth, in that very day all their thoughts perish. They can no longer pursue their purposes, resolutions, or intentions, however wise or benevolent they were. Surely such mortal creatures are very unfit objects of dependence. Let who will trust in them or lean upon them, they are liable to be disappointed in all their hopes and expectations. Again,

Men are extremely frail as well as mortal. Though they may be allowed to live, they may not be allowed to afford their fellow creatures the least relief or support in sickness, danger, or affliction. They may lose their health, or their limbs, or their senses, by sickness or accident, and become entirely incapable of aiding or supporting those who once had fondly and confidently leaned upon them. Men of high health and the best abilities are continually liable to such fatal disasters. How many such instances of this nature have happened, and how many are now to be seen in the world! The heads of families, the pastors of flocks, and the pillars of the state, are all liable, as well as others, to frailty and imbecility. The strongest man may lose all his strength, the wisest may lose all his wisdom, the richest man may lose all his wealth, and the ablest man may lose all his ability of doing good, in a single moment. The celebrated Pitt fell in the act of pleading the cause of Europe and America. And numberless others have as instantaneously and unexpectedly lost all their powers of doing good to mankind, who needed their kind and benevolent exertions for their assistance and relief. Can such feeble, frail, impotent creatures be proper objects of unreserved trust and confidence?

It is farther to be observed, that all men are mutable as well

as frail. They may have good desires, good designs, and good resolutions, but very suddenly and unexpectedly change them. Those whom they feel disposed to befriend to-day, they may be disposed to oppose and injure to-morrow. Such mutability of purposes and designs have happened in innumerable instances. How many thousands have been deceived, injured, and even ruined, by trusting in those who are given to change! It is characteristic of mankind to change their views, opinions, purposes and affections, as often as their circumstances change. Promising princes, heroic generals, warm patriots, and great philanthropists, who have done noble, beneficent actions, have often become in the course of life the very scourges of those whom they had greatly benefitted. Kind parents have often become unkind; dutiful children have often become undutiful; and brothers, who seemed to be born for adversity, have often become the bitterest enemies. How did Cain treat Abel? How did Jacob treat Esau? How did Joseph's brethren treat him? The mere change of opinion in religion, in politics and far less interesting subjects, has often destroyed the mutual confidence of those who were intimately connected by the ties of friendship and consanguinity. There is but one Being in the universe, who is without variableness or shadow of turning. All others are mutable, and among the most mutable are the children of men, who are entirely unworthy of each other's supreme confidence.

But were mankind neither mortal, nor frail, nor fickle in their nature, yet they are too absolutely dependent to be depended upon. In God they live, and move, and have their being. They are not sufficient of themselves to think, nor speak, nor act. The preparation of their heart and the answer of their tongue is of the Lord. Without him they can do nothing. They may enjoy health and strength, they may possess wisdom and knowledge, and they may feel the kindest disposition, and yet be utterly unable to assist a brother, or a neighbor, or a friend, or a stranger, in distress. God may place them at such a distance from one another, as to prevent their mutual aid and assistance. How often do mankind stand impotent spectators, and see their fellow men perish in the waves, or in the flames, or by enemies, or by accidents, without being able to reach forth their hands for their protection or relief! God fixes the bounds of every one's habitation. He places every person just where he pleases. He separates friends and families. He carries men whither he sees fit, with their intention, or without their intention, or contrary to their intention; and in this way prevents them from aiding, supporting, or relieving one another in any emergency. Or he

may do this as effectually by separating them only for a few hours, at a few miles distance. But even where they are present with each other, there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord. They can do nothing but what he sees fit to be done. They can employ neither their knowledge, nor wisdom, nor strength, any otherwise than he shall determine. They are entirely in his hand, and absolutely at his disposal. How unfit, then, are such entirely dependent creatures to be confided in or depended upon! And how justly and kindly does God admonish us to cease from man, whose breath, whose heart, and whose ways are all under his supreme control!

2. God warns men not to depend upon one another, to preserve them from the numerous dangers and disappointments to which such undue confidence exposes them. Pious and prudent parents always feel disposed to caution their children against going into paths of danger, and exposing themselves to unforeseen evils. So God, the kind parent of the universe, cautions all men to cease placing their ultimate dependence upon one another, in whom there is no help. He knows that neither parents nor children, neither rulers nor subjects, neither the great, nor the wise, nor the good, are worthy of supreme trust and confidence. He knows the greatest, the best, and the worst of mankind, may either intentionally or unintentionally disappoint the trust and hope placed upon them. He knows that any hopes or expectations placed upon any being or object below himself may be completely disappointed. And for this good reason he forewarns individuals and public bodies of the danger of trusting unreservedly in any human power, wisdom, or faithfulness. He admonishes every one not to trust in men of low degree, nor men of high degree, for he says they are both a vanity and a lie. And he warns nations not to place confidence in one another. There is a solemn admonition to this purpose, in the thirty-first of Isaiah. "Wo to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many, and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!" "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fall together." All undue dependence placed on man, whether by a person or a people, shall draw after it disappointment and regret.

3. God forewarns men not to depend upon one another, because it directly tends to alienate them from himself, and fix them down in ease and security, upon a false and fallible foun-

dation. When men withhold their confidence in God, they always place it on some other object or being, which is both their folly and guilt. So God represents it in respect to his people of old. "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Just so far as men trust in one another, they depart from God, and renounce their dependence upon him. And for this he expresses his severest displeasure. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Universal observation and experience confirm this truth. All men are naturally too averse to fly to God for aid or assistance, so long as they hope or expect to obtain it from one another. They live very easy and secure while they imagine human help is within their reach. They naturally cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God, so long as they think they can live well without him. Dependence is the primary ground of prayer, devotion and religious worship. So long, therefore, as men can live without a sense of their dependence upon God, they can and will live at a distance from him. How easy and joyfully do multitudes live, without God, without Christ, and without hope of future happiness, while they can lean upon their fellow creatures, and gratify their corrupt hearts in the pursuit of lying vanities! But whenever these weak and frail supports give way, they will find their need of the presence, favor and assistance of him whom they have forgotten. It is in mercy, therefore, that God forbids them to place their supreme dependence upon any being or object besides himself, who can and will keep them in perfect peace, so long as they trust in him. I may add,

4. God forbids all persons without exception, to place their supreme dependence upon any of their fellow men, however great, or wise, or good they may be, to prevent their ruining themselves for ever. For they are dependent upon him for that, which no other being can bestow upon them; and which even he himself cannot bestow upon them, without their trusting in him, and placing their supreme affection upon him. While they love the world and the things of the world supremely, they cannot love God and the things of God supremely. While they place their supreme trust in themselves, or in their fellow men, they cannot place their supreme trust and confidence in God alone. They must be turned from sin to holiness, and from supreme love of the world, to supreme love to God. But who or what can turn them? Neither men nor means can soften or turn their hearts, and cause them to set their affections on things above, and not upon things on the

earth. Parents cannot save their children, nor ministers their hearers. David could not save Absalom, nor Paul save Felix, nor Peter save Simon the sorcerer. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase. He can break down the strong holds of sinners, destroy their refuges of lies, dissolve their covenant with death and the grave, and prepare them for heaven, by making them willing, in the day of his power, to place their supreme love and dependence upon himself. In eternity, all mutual dependence among men will be dissolved, and they will all fall into the hands of the living God, and must be either happy or miserable, as they are disposed to rest or not to rest upon him alone for happiness. None can be happy after death, who do not choose God for their sole and supreme portion. Our Lord has declared that no man can be his disciple, or enter into the kingdom of heaven, who does not love him above all creatures, and forsake the whole world, for the sake of spiritual and divine enjoyments. Princes must renounce their thrones, the rich must renounce their wealth, and every man must renounce the idol in his heart, in order to love and enjoy God in this life or the next. Turn then an obedient ear to the warning voice of God: "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help," and place your supreme affection upon God, whose favor is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since mankind are so prone to place supreme dependence upon each other, they are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Though they are frail, mutable, mortal creatures, they have a right to place subordinate dependence upon one another. The child has a right to place some dependence upon the parent, and the parent upon the child. The brother has a right to place some dependence upon the brother, and the sister upon the sister. The youth has a right to place some dependence upon the aged, and the aged upon the youth. The friend has a right to place some dependence upon the friend, the poor upon the rich, and the rich upon the poor. But whether these various classes of people place a subordinate or supreme dependence upon each other, they are always liable to be disappointed in their hopes and expectations, which is a most fruitful source of sorrow and deep distress. How often are children disappointed by the death of their parents, and parents by the death of their children! How often are the young disappointed by the death of the aged, and the aged by the death of the young! How often are friends disappointed by the death

of friends, and people in general by the death of able and faithful men in the lower and higher stations in life! Death and sorrow are intimately connected. They have reigned together all over the world, ever since the death of Abel. They are still reigning together, and drawing sighs from the hearts and tears from the eyes of thousands every day. Man goeth to his long home, and the bereaved, disappointed and afflicted mourners go about the streets every where. Were there no other troubles and afflictions but what spring from the painful strokes of death, the whole family of man might be justly called a family of affliction. This universal affliction is unavoidable, whether men place a subordinate or supreme dependence upon one another. Any dependence creates hope, and the disappointment of hope never fails to create sorrow in proportion to the hopes disappointed. Those who have placed an undue dependence upon their deceased relatives, friends and connections, have prepared themselves for severer afflictions; and those who have placed their supreme dependence upon them, have procured for themselves the deepest, most lasting, and overwhelming sorrows. How many hearts have been entirely broken by bereavements! David's heart was almost broken by the death of his idolized son Absalom; and Rachel's heart by the death of her children. Jacob placed an undue affection and dependence upon Joseph, which well nigh brought his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Trusting in man, instead of trusting in God, has always been extremely common, sinful, and dangerous. It has been the occasion of adding a ten-fold weight to all the common calamities, bereavements and afflictions which have fallen to the lot of mankind in every age and part of the world. It is because men are born to sin, that they are born to death and sorrow. If they would live above the world, the sorrow of the world, which worketh death, would not reach them. If they would give up themselves, their friends, and all that is most agreeable and valuable in life to the supreme disposal of God, he would give them that peace which the world cannot give, nor take away.

2. Since mankind are so apt to place their supreme dependence on each other, instead of placing it upon God, we may see one reason why he causes so many dark and distressing scenes of mortality among them. Every instance of mortality is a melancholy event; but there are some instances of mortality which are attended with circumstances peculiarly afflictive, alarming, and impressive. Sudden and unexpected deaths of young or old are of this character: so are the deaths of amiable and promising youths and young men; so are the deaths of the heads of rising families; and so are the deaths of men of

superior talents, tried integrity, and extensive usefulness. When death comes and cuts off the lives of such persons as these, it never fails to shake the foundations upon which mankind are so apt to misplace their hopes and dependence. It gives them ocular evidence, that neither health nor strength of body, nor mental talents and acquisitions, nor exemplary conduct, nor any promising prospects, are any security against the stroke of death. When any die by the hand of violence, or by the hand of public justice, or by unforeseen accidents, or by a burning building, or sinking ship; these circumstances are more affecting and alarming than death itself in the common course of nature. Some such sudden, unexpected and distressing instances of mortality seem necessary to awaken the living out of their stupidity, and give them a realizing sense of their constant and absolute dependence on him, in whose hand their breath is, and whose are all their ways. When God sends his judgments on the earth, he intends that the inhabitants of the world shall learn righteousness. They take but little notice of the rising and the setting of the sun, of the regular succession of the seasons, and the common blessings of providence, because all these things are agreeable to their hopes and expectations; but when God sends death among them in its most terrible forms, it shakes the false foundation of their hopes, and brings them to a proper sense of their entire dependence on himself. God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. He never employs this last most painful and powerful method to alarm his people, until he has found all milder methods fail of producing this needful and salutary effect. "Therefore, saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will melt them and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?" We have no reason to think hard of God, when he employs the best though the severest means to do us good. Great afflictions more frequently do greater good to the afflicted, than lighter afflictions. And for this reason God often inflicts greater evils on good men, than upon bad. Whom did he ever more severely melt and try, than Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Job? The bereaved and afflicted are very ready to imagine there is no sorrow like unto their sorrow; but they are generally mistaken in thinking they have the greatest burdens to bear. But if they have a double portion, they may and ought to turn it into a double portion of good.

3. Since men are so prone to place supreme dependence upon one another, and since God has so plainly and solemnly warned them against it, it must be very unwise and criminal to disregard his kind and salutary admonitions. We have heard what he has said in his word against trusting in man, who is a

weak, feeble, mutable, impotent creature, whose breath goeth forth, who returneth to his earth, and whose thoughts that very day perish, and in whom there is no help. We have heard how in his providence he orders the times, the means, and the circumstances of death, in the best manner to impress upon the minds of all persons of all ages, characters and conditions, an habitual sense that they are dying creatures, and live in a dying world. He leads little children to see little children put into the grave. He leads youth to see youths put into the grave. He leads those in the midst of their days, their hopes, and promising prospects, to see others of the same character and condition put into the grave. He leads old men to see old men, wise men to see wise men, great men to see great men, rich men to see rich men, and poor men to see poor men, put into the grave. Now, can we conceive how God could have executed the universal sentence of mortality, which he has passed upon mankind, in a wiser and better manner than this? In this way he shows every child, every youth, and every man, he must die, by placing the dying and the dead of his own age, character and condition before his eyes. The eye affects the heart. It is far more affecting to see the dying and the dead, than to hear of the dying and the dead. God providentially leads almost every child to the grave of a child, every youth to the grave of a youth, every young man to the grave of a young man, and every old man to the grave of an old man. Is there a child seven years old in this house, is there a youth, or is there an old man, whom God has not led to the grave, and shown him that that is his house, where he must lie and crumble to the dust? Surely all men must be extremely unwise and criminal, if they place their supreme dependence upon one another, after God has so repeatedly and solemnly warned them against this easily besetting sin. Every man knows that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish; and that he cannot redeem himself or his brother from the grave. It is criminal presumption for any of mankind to place their supreme dependence upon one another. They can have no excuse for misplacing their confidence and hopes, which will certainly be buried either in their own graves, or in the graves of others. How many misplace their dependence and confidence, and reap the bitter fruits of their folly by losses, disappointments and wretchedness? Yet this fatal error prevails more or less among all classes of men. Children will unreasonably depend upon their parents, and parents will unreasonably depend upon their children, and friends upon friends, though all know one another to be frail, mutable, dying

creatures. Be entreated then to "cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

4. Since all men are so prone to place an undue dependence upon one another, they all stand in need of trials, afflictions, and bereavements in this present life. These are all suited to teach them what they are most unapt to learn, and have the most need to learn; that is, to withdraw their attention, affections and their dependence, from all creatures and created objects, and to place their supreme love and dependence upon God himself, who is supremely worthy of their supreme regard and confidence. Adversity is generally more beneficial to men, than prosperity. Prosperity tends to lead them to forget and forsake God, and to place their highest hopes and dependence upon the men and things of the world. But adversity has an opposite tendency, to withdraw their thoughts, their hopes and their dependence from the world, and to persuade them to give God the supreme affection of their hearts, and to commit all their temporal, spiritual and eternal interests into his hand, and confide in his faithfulness. When all other means failed to humble and reform Manasseh, that prodigy of wickedness, the great and dreadful evils God brought upon him made him feel the duty and happiness of giving his heart and life to him who had severely and mercifully afflicted him. David found it was good for him that he had been afflicted. Multitudes have found the need and the benefit of afflictions, and especially of bereavements. How many parents have been benefitted by the death of their children, and how many children have been benefitted by the death of their parents! How often has the death of a brother proved the salvation of a brother, and the death of a sister the salvation of a sister, and the death of a friend the salvation of a friend; and one sudden, extraordinary death proved the means of preparing many, both for living and dying! Let none think it strange that they are visited with afflictions, bereavements, and fiery trials, as though some strange thing had happened to them; for this is the very method which God finds it necessary to employ, to teach men their duty, and prepare them to do it.

5. We learn from what has been said, when bereavements and afflictions have their proper and salutary effect upon those who are subjects of them. They are powerful means, and designed to produce very sensible and important effects. They always prove beneficial, or detrimental. They always make men better or worse. They are proper trials, because they excite and draw forth good or evil affections. They always lead men to God, or from God. They lead them from God, when they lead them to transfer their dependence and hopes only

from one person or created object to another. If God takes away one idol, which they have set up in their hearts, they will set up another, and place their dependence and hopes upon it. When he takes away one child from parents, they will transfer their affections, and hopes, and dependence to another. When God removed from Jacob his darling son Joseph, he made a darling of his son Benjamin, and his heart became bound up in him. When parents lose an only child, or all the children they have had, they will deeply lament their loss, until they fix their supreme love, hope and dependence on their silver and gold, houses and lands, or other worldly possessions. In all such cases, afflictions and bereavements lead men from God, from duty, and from heaven. But when fiery trials and sore bereavements lead men to trust in God and place their supreme affections, hopes and dependence upon him, and cause them to renounce all their undue attachment to the world, and all the scenes and objects in it, then they produce their proper salutary effects. They then have reason to thank God that he has purged their hearts from their dross and tin in the furnace of affliction. You have all of you, my hearers, been more or less afflicted and bereaved. Some of you have buried brothers and sisters. Some of you have buried sons and daughters. Some of you have buried husbands and wives. Some of you have lost intimate and highly valued friends and acqnaintance. And some of you have had a large share in the common evils and calamities of life. Though all these trials, afflictions and bereavements have been transitory, yet their effects have been great and permanent. He who has afflicted you has watched over you every moment, and marked all the conflicts of your minds and motions of your hearts, under his chastising hand. He has seen whether you have trusted in man, or in himself; whether you have renounced your refuges of lies, and taken shelter in his name, as the strong tower of your safety and support. Will you then be so good to yourselves as seriously and impartially to inquire, whether you have from time to time come out of the furnace of affliction purified and refined, or become reprobate silver, because you have rejected the Lord as the supreme object of your hopes and dependence. These are serious and important questions, which every one ought to answer to himself according to truth. You may know, if you examine your own hearts, whether you have learned to submit to and depend upon God, as the ground of your hope, consolation and confidence, by the things you have suffered in the course of life. This is the duty of all, but especially of those who have just

been bereaved of an aged father,* upon whom they had as much reason to place a subordinate dependence as almost any children ever had. Their father set them a bright example of sobriety, temperance, prudence, industry, economy, paternal care and affection, and indeed of every domestic virtue. God preserved his life, his health, activity and usefulness, in mercy to them, even to a very old age. They have good reason to remember and imitate his exemplary life, and to be thankful for the great benefits they have received from his paternal care over them and kindness to them. And, if they are thankful to God for giving them such a valued and esteemed father, they will be cordially submissive to him in taking him away so late in life, though very suddenly and unexpectedly. It becomes them to be still, and not indulge nor utter the least complaint under their sore bereavement, because a wise and holy and merciful God has done it. The brothers, and sisters, and friends of the deceased, have the same reasons to be thankful and submissive under the present afflictive hand of God. Mr. WARE acted with great propriety, integrity and fidelity in all the relations, connections and stations in which he was placed. He commanded the love, respect, and proper confidence of his neighbors, who highly esteemed him for his friendly and obliging disposition, and his beneficent and sympathetic conduct, on all proper occasions. In the lower and higher offices he filled, he uniformly sustained a fair, unblemished character for sound judgment, strict integrity, and an uniform regard for the good of civil society. He was frequently chosen to offices of public trust and confidence, and it is not known that he ever designedly or undesignedly betrayed the public trusts reposed in him. But he was a frail, mutable, mortal man, in whom no supreme trust was to be placed. His breath has gone forth, he has returned to his earth, and all his useful thoughts, intentions and desires towards those whom he has left behind, are perished. This is not a private, but public loss, which ought to be lamented not only by his children and brothers and sisters, but by this whole town, who have received not a little benefit from his long, active, useful live. He died an old man; and old men in particular ought to regard his decease as a solemn admonition to be also ready, to finish their course, and give up their last and infinitely solemn and interesting account.

* Mr. Phinehas Ware.

# SERMON XXVI.

## EXPECTATION OF LONG LIFE UNWISE.

FEBRUARY 5, 1826.

For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them. — Eccles. ix. 12.

In the preceding verse, Solomon represents mankind as continually liable to be disappointed in their most sanguine hopes, expectations and pursuits. "I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." And he subjoins the text, that the uncertainty of life is the general occasion of their disappointments. "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." These words imply, that mankind naturally desire and hope that their life will be preserved and continued; but yet that their desires and hopes of living are often disappointed, by death's coming to them in an evil time suddenly and unexpectedly. The truth of this observation has been visibly and strikingly confirmed by the experience of mankind from age to age, ever since the sentence of mortality has been passed upon them. Hence we may conclude,

That men are unwise in expecting to live long in this world. I shall inquire,

I. Why men are so apt to expect to live long in this world; and,

II. Why they are unwise in cherishing this expectation.

I. Let us inquire why men are so apt to expect to live long

in this world. It needs no proof that they are apt to expect that their lives will be prolonged even to old age. It is the inward thought, hope and expectation of those in the morning, in the meridian, and even in the decline of life, that they shall live many days, if not many years. There is not, perhaps, a single individual, who has come to years of reflection, that does not hope and expect to live longer in the world. But the question before us is, why do mankind so generally expect to have their lives prolonged? This may be owing to two things. One is, that they naturally love life. There is nothing in this world that they deem more precious and valuable, than life. "Skin for skin; all that a man hath will he give for his life." Solomon says, "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." This is a beautiful world, and contains ten thousand things which are suited to please its rational inhabitants, and create a fondness for living. Hezekiah regretted that his days should be cut off, and that he should no more behold man with the inhabitants of the world. David said to God, "Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee." Since men naturally love life and desire to live, they as naturally hope and expect to live. They naturally and insensibly attend to every thing which serves to cherish their fond expectation, and easily persuade themselves that their expectation is well founded. The health they have enjoyed, the dangers they have escaped, the preservations they have experienced, the means they have used and intend to use to lengthen out their days all serve to corroborate and confirm their pleasing expectation that their lives shall be long continued. But their dread of death is another strong and powerful reason why they cherish the expectation of living to the latest period of human life. Death is generally the king of terrors to the most of mankind, which leads them to put far away the evil day, and turn their attention from those truths, those objects, and those scenes, which they know have a tendency to remind them of their frailty and mortality, and weaken their expectation of living. It is not strange, therefore, that their dread of death should strengthen their love of life; and their love of life should cherish, increase and confirm their desire, their hope, and their expectation of living for a great while to come. Men often suffer their high hopes and expectations respecting other things besides life, to blind their minds and stifle the plainest dictates of sound reason. Their natural love of life, and their natural dread of death, are causes sufficient to account for their stupid and absurd thought and expectation, that they shall live for ever and not see corruption.

We are next to inquire,

II. Why it is unwise in persons of all ages, characters, and conditions, to harbor and cherish the expectation of living long in this world. Here I may observe,

1. This is unwise, because God has designedly concealed the length of their days. He has not told them how long they shall live, nor how soon they shall die; though he has assured them that he has determined the number of their months, and fixed the bounds over which they cannot pass. He has said to every one, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." He has said, "It is appointed unto all men once to die." He has said, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war." And he has said, "Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets." So plainly and repeatedly has he pronounced the sentence of death upon all mankind; but he has reserved the times of executing this sentence upon each individual in his own power. Though he has determined when, and where, and by what means every person shall die, yet he has concealed all these things in his own breast, and revealed them to no man living. All that the living know upon this subject is, that there is "a time to be born, and a time to die." No man, therefore, says the text, knoweth his time; that is, the time of his dying. Since God has involved all men in this absolute darkness and ignorance respecting the time of their decease, they are very unwise to consider it as an evidence of long life; for it is no more an evidence of a long than of a short life. And God has undoubtedly subjected them to this dark and disagreeable uncertainty respecting this most solemn and interesting event, to check and restrain their too fond desires and expectations of living a great while in the world. In the view of reason, this uncertainty has a tendency to keep death continually in view, and not to push it out of sight and out of mind. And when it is realized in a time of sickness or danger, it seldom fails of producing this salutary effect. It is extremely unwise in mankind to build, as multitudes do, high hopes and expectations of living upon the very uncertainty of life.

2. It is very unwise in men to calculate upon long life, because they are continually liable to innumerable unknown and unavoidable causes of death. Every creature and object in this world is armed against the life of man. He is in danger from the air, the earth, the fire and the water. Each of these elements has destroyed the lives of thousands. He is in danger from every living creature that flies, or moves, or creeps upon the earth, or swims in the stream or ocean. He is in

danger from his food and medicine; from his enemies; and from his friends, who unintentionally and accidentally may put a period to his life. These causes of death are often unforeseen and unavoidable by short-sighted men. Man knoweth not his time, because like the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them. Men, like the fishes and the fowls, are continually exposed to a vast many fatal snares and accidents, which unexpectedly and instantaneously produce their fatal effects. What multitudes of mankind have suddenly and unexpectedly perished by fire, by water, and by the hand of violence! No person knows how soon some fatal accident may befall him. He continually walks upon the side of the grave, and the verge of eternity. It is extremely unwise for mankind to indulge strong hopes and expectations of living long in this world, where they are continually exposed to so many unseen, unavoidable, and fatal accidents.

3. Men are unwise to expect that their lives will be long lengthened out, because God, in his providence, is continually and solemnly warning them against such vain expectations. He has for nearly four thousand years been gradually curtailing the lives of men. It has been computed that more than half of mankind die before they are eight years old. How many more die before they reach the age of manhood! How many more before they reach the meridian of life! How many more before they reach the period of seventy years! And it is very rare to meet a man who has arrived at eighty; and a still more striking spectacle to see a man who is a hundred years old. Providence is constantly and visibly confirming the declaration of scripture, that the grave is without any order. God is continually calling the human race out of time into eternity, without any apparent regard to their age, their character, or their condition in life. He is continually taking away the child before the youth, the youth before the man, the man of twenty before the man of forty, the man of forty before the man of fifty, or sixty, or seventy, or eighty, or any of a greater age. He promiscuously takes away the useless and the useful, the learned and unlearned, the rich and the poor, the religious and irreligious. He apparently disregards the desires, the hopes, the expectations, and even the prayers of the dying, and those of their nearest and dearest friends. As God gives and preserves, so he takes away life, by his particular providence. According to the common and general laws of nature, men might live now as long as they did in the first generations of mankind. But very few of mankind, at this day, die a proper

natural death. The decays of age are generally premature, and hastened by the improvidence, intemperance, and excessive labors and fatigues of men in the earlier or later periods of life. They are extremely apt to be too lavish of their strength, and too careless of their health and safety, by which they bring upon themselves a premature and painful old age, which they might retard and render vastly more easy, pleasant, and useful. The general laws by which God governs the natural world allow men to live much longer in the world than they commonly do. But God, by his particular providence, causes one general law of nature to counteract and obstruct another in producing its natural effect. It is by means of a particular providence that God brings about storms, and earthquakes, and inundations, and conflagrations, and hurricanes, and tornadoes, and pestilences, and sweeping sicknesses, and fatal accidents. We have no account of God's visiting the world with those dire calamities for nearly two thousand years, except in one instance, that of the Flood. It is not so strange, therefore, that the lives of men were once ten-fold longer than they are generally at the present. But ever since God reduced the common period of human life from about a thousand, to about three-score years and ten, he has appeared to dispose of the lives of men by a more particular providence, and employs innumerable causes to counteract the general laws of nature, which once amazingly prolonged the lives of men. God is now, by his particular providence, visibly and solemnly admonishing the living, not to expect that he will carry many of them to old age, but to expect a short, rather than a long life. God is reading them a solemn lecture upon the shortness and uncertainty of their lives, by causing so many of every age, character, and condition, to fall around them from year to year, from month to month, from week to week, and from day to day. If they would only measure their lives, as God measures them in his providence, they would be more apt to expect a short, than a long life. They are extremely unwise in not measuring their lives by the most accurate standard God has given them, by which to pass a just estimate upon the length of their lives. Let a child, a youth, a man of any age, seriously consider in how many ways God is cutting short the lives of men, every where and every day, how many hair-breadth escapes he has had, and it will convince him that it is folly and presumption in him, to expect that his own life will be lengthened rather than shortened. Will wise men, will bad men, will good men, risk the security of all their property upon the uncertain life of a child, or a youth, or of any man, whether young or old, rich or poor, robust or feeble? No, they will not trust to any such

uncertain foundation for the security of property. How much more unwise and absurd is it, for them to build their fondest and strongest hopes of life itself upon so slender and precarious a foundation!

4. It will appear still more unwise and absurd for men to form and cherish high hopes and expectations of living long in this world, if we consider how expressly and repeatedly God, in his word, has warned and admonished them against it. Solomon says, "Man knoweth not his time." Job says, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days." "He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." David says to God, "Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee; verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity." Again, he says to God, "Thou turnest man to destruction: and sayest, Return, ye children of men." "Thou carriest them away as with a flood: they are as a sleep; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withereth." God says to every man by Solomon, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." The apostle James says, "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: for what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall live, and do this or that." The inspired writers in these passages have given a lively and instructive picture of the frailty of man, and of the shortness and uncertainty of human life. But Christ still more expressly and pointedly warned men against putting far away the evil day, and banishing the thoughts of death from their minds. He said, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." "Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning. Lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and

there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" All these are but a few of the solemn admonitions which may be found upon almost every page of the Bible, against men's indulging the vain and pleasing expectation of living long in this dying world. But why should God so expressly, so pointedly, and so abundantly warn mankind against their forgetting their frailty and mortality, and expecting to live many days in a world where they know not that they shall live one day? The reason every sober, reflecting person may find in his own mind. Who is not conscious of indulging this vain and groundless expectation? But God in mercy forbids it, and has employed the best means to prevent it. Finally, every one must be conscious that he deserves to die, for his past misimprovement of his precious life. Who can look back upon the days and years he has lived, without a consciousness of having neglected and perverted many golden seasons and opportunities of doing and getting good, and of glorifying the Giver and Preserver of his life, for which he deserves to be cut down as a cumberer of the ground? What ground then has he to expect that God will continue his patience, forbearance, and long-suffering towards him? He can see good reasons why God should cut short his days, but not so good reasons why he should prolong his forfeited, or useless, or worse than useless life. It is nothing less than presumption for any of the living to expect that their forfeited days should be prolonged. They have much more reason to feel and say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed."

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since mankind are so extremely apt to harbor and cherish habitual expectation of the long continuance of life, there is reason to think that they generally die unexpectedly to themselves. Though God is constantly admonishing them by his word and providence of the frailty and uncertainty of life, yet they imagine that their mountain stands strong, and death at a great distance from them, if not from others; and of course, let death come when it will, whether in an earlier or later period of life, whether by a slow lingering disorder, or by an acute distemper, or some unforeseen accident, it comes unexpectedly. The weak, debilitated person loves to live, and dreads to die, and cherishes the hope and expectation that he may gradually

recover from his low and languishing state, and for a long time enjoy more health and strength than he ever enjoyed before. But if he should not become so strong and robust as some others, yet he secretly indulges a hope and expectation that he may live a long though feeble life, as others have done. And notwithstanding he perceives that he is gradually declining from month to month, and from week to week, and even from day to day, he still fixes his attention on some flattering symptom, and cherishes a hope of living, which diverts his mind from the painful thoughts of dying, until a month, or a week, or day before he suddenly and unexpectedly goes the way of all the earth. How often do such slow, sudden deaths occur! Those who are seized with some acute disorder are apt to hope that it will be of short continuance, and though hard to endure, that they shall soon recover their usual health and strength, until forty-eight or twenty-four hours before they are surprised at the certain prospect of dropping suddenly into eternity. To these may be added the numerous instances of sudden and unexpected deaths, by fatal accidents. Though but very few persons would choose to die suddenly and unexpectedly, yet multitudes choose to do that which exposes them to an unexpected death; for they choose to cherish the expectation of living, as long as possible, and to banish from their minds the thoughts of dying, as long as possible. They will inwardly boast of to-morrow, though they know not what a day may bring forth. They will say to themselves, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." They will "think all men mortal, but themselves." They will think that while they see others taken, they shall be left. They will disregard what observation, reason and scripture tells them of the uncertainty of life, and strengthen their hopes and expectation of living, from the very evidence God has given of their constant danger of dying. It must be because madness is in their hearts, that they stupidly harbor and cherish the hope and expectation of living till the moment they go to the dead.

2. It appears from what has been said, that death commonly comes to men in an evil time. They are commonly called out of this into another world, suddenly and unexpectedly to themselves, as the fish is caught in the net, and the bird in the snare, in an evil time. It is always an evil time, to do any thing of serious and weighty importance to ourselves, or to others, suddenly and unexpectedly. To die is the great and last act to be done on the stage of life, and extremely solemn and interesting to the dying and to the living; and a sudden and unexpected time is certainly a very evil time to make the solemn and important transition out of this into the invisible and eternal world. To die suddenly and unexpectedly is usually

attended with very great and serious evils, which every body would wish to escape. Who among the rich, the high, and the great, would not dread to be called suddenly and unexpectedly out of time into eternity? Who among the young, the gay, the thoughtless and stupid, would not tremble at the thought of being summoned before the bar of God suddenly, and without a moment's time for anticipation and reflection? Who among the aged and the pious would not deprecate meeting death at an unexpected time and place? Who manage either their temporal or spiritual concerns with so much discretion, prudence and wisdom, as to be duly prepared to meet death, without any time to set their souls and houses in order? Hezekiah deprecated an early and unexpected death. And David ardently prayed for a little space to prepare for his great and last change. "O spare me," said he to God, "that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more." It is a great evil and calamity to be overwhelmed with unthought-of cares and concerns in a dying hour. But an unexpected and sudden death very often brings with it a multitude of such unthought-of, and unregulated, and neglected cares and concerns. So that death always comes in an evil time, when it comes unexpectedly. And it appears from what has been said, that it almost universally comes unanticipated and unexpected. Though mankind see wise men die, and likewise the fool and brutish person perish, yet they will indulge the inward thought, the secret expectation, that they shall never leave this world and see corruption. They fit themselves for a death unexpected and unprepared for, which involves them in the greatest darkness, anxiety and distress, that they ever experienced. If this were not common, it would be strange; but that it is common, is stranger still; since God in his word and providence has given them so many admonitions always to stand expecting and waiting for their great and last change.

3. It appears from men's undue expectation of living, why bereavements are often so heavy and grievous to be borne. Those who habitually expect to live long in the world themselves, are almost equally prone to expect that their relatives and friends will be long-lived; and therefore their sudden and unexpected death brings with it a sudden and unexpected bereavement, which often gives a treble and sometimes a tenfold weight to it. When a bereavement is previously expected, the mind has time to collect itself, and prepare to support it, which greatly mitigates the affliction. But when bereavements come suddenly and unexpectedly, they discompose the mind, obstruct the exercise of the rational powers, and take away fortitude and resolution, and render them too heavy to be borne. The sudden and unexpected afflictions and bereavements of

Job overwhelmed his mind, and struck him dumb for seven days and seven nights. And the sudden death of Absalom was a bereavement too heavy for David to bear with calmness, patience and submission. Unexpected bereavements have often struck mourners not only dumb, but disconsolate, and even senseless all their days; and not in a few instances, instantaneously put a period to their lives. As deaths commonly come unexpected to the dying, so they commonly come unexpected to the living, and pierce their hearts with keen anguish and distress. Hence says Solomon, when man goeth to his long home, the mourners go about the streets. By their fondness and expectation of living, they unfit themselves for the bearing of bereavements, which they have good reason to expect, and subject themselves to unnecessary grief and sorrow. Parents have abundant reason to expect to be bereaved of their children. Children have abundant reason to expect to be bereaved of their parents. The nearest and dearest friends have abundant reason to expect that their connections in this world will be dissolved. God, by his word and providence, is continually teaching them to expect the trials of sore bereavements. The father who has not lost a son or a daughter; the son or the daughter that has not lost a father or mother; the brother that has not lost a brother; and the sister that has not lost a sister, and the man who has not lost an intimate friend; all such persons have abundant reason to live in the expectation of sore bereavements still to fall to their lot, and that too, suddenly and unexpectedly. It is extreme folly for any to hope and expect that they shall be exempted from the troubles, and afflictions, and bereavements, which have wrung the hearts of thousands and thousands. The longer any live, the more bereavements and sorrows they have reason to expect. If their lives should be protracted, the lives of those whom they most value and esteem may be shortened, proving a source of exquisite sorrow and lamentation. And if they unwisely forget the frailty and mortality of their friends, they will lay a foundation for aggravated grief and disappointment.

4. Since death so generally comes suddenly and unexpectedly to the living, we learn the wisdom and importance of early piety. As children and youth are not too young to die, so they are not too young to remember their Creator, and give their hearts and lives to God. They are of all persons most apt to hope and expect to live a great while in this world. They look upon the aged as destined to death, but they expect that they are destined to life. But God has told them by his providence, as well as by his word, that death will make greater ravages among them, according to their numbers, than among any other class of the living. There are far more of mankind

die in infancy, childhood and youth, than in any other period of life. While children and youth live without fear, without prayer, and without hope in Christ, they are imminently exposed to be cut down, and suddenly and unexpectedly hurried into eternity unprepared, to the present sorrow of their pious parents and friends, and to their own everlasting sorrow. Where is the individual child, or youth, that has a rational ground to expect that he shall live to three-score years and ten, or even to the meridian of life? Every child and youth has far more reason to expect, that as the fish is caught in the net, and the bird in the snare, he shall fall an early victim to some mortal disease, or fatal accident. If the young were exempted from death, they might have a better excuse than others for neglecting the concerns of their souls. But since they are more than others exposed to an early and sudden death, they are more inexcusable for spending their days in sin and vanity, and putting far away the evil day, and unfitting themselves both for living and dying. Is it not time, high time for children and youth in this place to attend to the things which belong to their everlasting peace, before their feet stumble on the dark mountains of death? How can they answer it to God, if they spend their childhood and youth in vanity? And how can they hope to escape an early and unexpected death, if they disregard and disobey the plain and repeated admonitions of God in his word, and in his providence which is constantly calling them to witness the disappointments of the dying and the living?

5. We learn from what has been said, why God does cause so many sudden and unexpected deaths to take place in the world. God might bring every one to the grave in a good time, both for himself and for others. He does in some few cases order all the circumstances of death in such a manner, as to gratify the desires of the dying and the living. Some of the ancient patriarchs died in perfect peace to themselves, and to their surviving friends. And who could desire to die at a better time, and in a better manner, than good old Simeon and Barzillai did? But how seldom does death come to men in such a good time, and in such a peaceful manner! Death far more commonly seizes the young and the old, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the gracious and the graceless, as the fish that is caught in the net and the bird in the snare, in an evil time, when they little expect it, and are little prepared for it. God knows that this is a sore evil to the sons of men. Why then does he so often send death to so many persons, and so many houses, suddenly and unexpectedly? It is undoubtedly designed more for the benefit of the living than for the dying. It may be a token of evil to the dying, but a

token of good to the living. It is suited to afflict, to instruct, and to produce a salutary and saving impression on the minds of mourners. God sees it necessary that some other means should be employed to awaken the stupid, than his word, which they will not read, will not hear, or will not understand. When death comes in an evil time, suddenly and unexpectedly to the old, it is alarming to the old; but when it comes suddenly and unexpected to the young, to the thoughtless, to the gay, and to the secure, it seldom fails of making a sensible, if not a lasting impression upon the most careless and stupid. How many have been effectually awakened, by such sudden, unexpected, and solemn instances of death!

6. We learn from what has been said, that the late death of a youth in this place is a loud call to the young to be also ready. They know not which of their names stands next in death's commission. It is God, who speaks by this instance of sudden and unexpected death; and it is God who speaks to the youth, who have resisted other calls and admonitions, to prepare for that eternity, to which they are rapidly tending. To prepare, I say; for no man, no youth, is prepared for heaven, while his heart is at total enmity against God. Such a heart will effectually shut any of mankind out of heaven. And such a heart the young in this place give too much evidence that they possess; and of course that they are actually unprepared to die. How dangerous then is your situation! If you must leave this world, and are not prepared for heaven, what are you prepared for? Be entreated to answer this question, and it cannot fail to condemn you. Your own hearts are the highest evidence that you are in a wretched and forlorn situation. And where can you find better directions, than in the Bible? It commands you to remember your Creator in the days of your youth. Are you prepared to meet death in such a manner as that young person did?

Finally, this subject shows that the present mourners have great cause of sorrow. God has taken away their son in the morning of life. He has taken him away suddenly. He has taken him away in an evil time to them. Less than a year ago, they were called to a similar bereavement. The wounds of that bereavement are not healed, before they have sorrow upon sorrow. Repeated strokes must give them deeper and deeper wounds. They may with some propriety cry, "Behold, all ye that pass by, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." They have great need of consolation from God, and from man. Man will pity, but God only can heal their wounds. Let them apply to him properly, and it will not be in vain.

# SERMON XXVII.

## SOULS OF BELIEVERS LIVE SEPARATE FROM THEIR BODIES.

MAY 14, 1826.

He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. — JOHN, xi. 25.

WHEN Lazarus of Bethany was sick, his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent for Christ to come and visit him; but for good reasons he delayed coming until Lazarus was dead. And when he came, Martha regretted his delay, and said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.—Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." These declarations look, at first view, as very inconsistent and absurd; but they may be easily reconciled. Christ here speaks of two kinds of death; the death of the body, and the death of the soul. Though he allows that believers may die a natural death, and their bodies may sleep in the dust until the resurrection at the last day, yet he denies that their souls die with their bodies, or become dormant and insensible. But on the contrary, he suggests that they shall still live, from the time they leave their bodies to the time they are reunited at the general resurrection. Taking our Saviour's words in this plain and obvious sense, they are so far from being absurd and inconsistent, that they convey in a very striking manner, a very serious and interesting truth, which all the living ought to believe and realize. This, therefore, is the truth which falls under our present consideration:

That the souls of believers shall live while separate from their bodies. I shall show,

I. That the soul and body are distinct.

II. That the souls of believers shall live, while separate from their bodies. And,

III. What life they shall live in that separate state.

I. We are to consider the distinction between the soul and the body. This distinction is disbelieved and denied by some, though it is one of the most plain and sensible distinctions in nature. The body is material, but the soul is spiritual. The body has properties which are not to be found in spirit; and the spirit has properties which are not to be found in body. The essential properties of matter are extension, solidity and gravitation; but the essential properties of spirit are sensibility, perception, understanding and volition. These essential properties of matter and mind are so entirely different and distinct, that they cannot be transferred from the one to the other, or transformed into one another. Matter cannot be made to perceive, understand and will; nor can the properties of extension, solidity and gravitation be transformed into intellectual faculties. We cannot conceive that even omnipotence can destroy the essential distinction between matter and mind, body and soul. God cannot give extension, solidity and gravitation to the soul, nor perception, thought and volition to the body. All we know about body are its properties; and all we know about mind are its properties; and, by knowing these, we know that matter and mind are essentially different, and so long as they exist they must be distinct existences. This we find is the general representation of scripture. In the first account we have of man, his body and soul are represented as distinct and separate. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." As the body and soul of man were at first formed separately and distinctly, so they are visibly separated at death. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." Upon the ground of this distinction, Christ tells his followers, "Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." The apostle James employs this distinction to illustrate another subject. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." The apostle Peter speaks of his own body as distinct from his soul. "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus hath showed me." By this tabernacle he means his

body, and by putting it off he means dying, as he explains it in the next words. "Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." The apostle Paul, in the fifth chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians, uses the same figurative language that Peter does, to mark the distinction between the soul and the body. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.—Therefore we are always confident,—and willing to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Paul also tells us of his spirit's being caught up to heaven, while his body remained on earth. "I knew a man in Christ about fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell;) such an one caught up to the third heaven." Would Paul have such doubts about being in or out of the body, if he knew there was no essential distinction between the soul and the body? Or would such a distinction have been so often mentioned in scripture, if the inspired writers knew that no such distinction existed? But not to insist any longer upon so plain a point, as the distinction between the soul and the body, I pass,

II. To show that the souls of believers live while separate from their bodies. It appears from the distinction we have just illustrated, that the soul may live, while the body dies; that the soul may act, while the body has lost all its power of action; and that the soul may return to God, while the body lies mouldering in the dust. And since this is possible, we have ground to think that the souls of believers will live through all the intermediate state from death to the resurrection of the body. For,

1. This will prevent the loss of much happiness. The period from the beginning to the end of time will be a very long period. Nearly six thousand years have rolled away since the creation of the world, and we know not how many more years may roll away before it comes to an end. In this long tract of time, many millions of believers have lived and died, and will live and die. All these, if allowed to live and be present with the Lord, while absent from the body, will enjoy immense measures of happiness. But if they all have been, and will be, cast into a state of torpidity and insensibility at death, then they will suffer an irreparable loss of happiness. But can we admit the thought, that the pure spirits of the patriarchs, of the prophets, of the apostles, and of the primitive christians, are

sleeping with their bodies, devoid of all perception, sensibility and enjoyment? Is it not far more reasonable to suppose that God never has suffered, and never will suffer, the souls of believers to lie dormant in the grave, and lose all the good they might enjoy in the intermediate state from death to the resurrection? This will appear still more reasonable if we consider,

2. That the glory of God requires him to preserve the souls of believers in a state of life and activity, after they leave their bodies. In their separate state, they will be freed from their natural and moral imperfections, and prepared to serve and glorify God unspeakably better than they ever did while they remained in the body. They will be capable of serving God day and night in his temple, without cessation or weariness. He delights in their service here, and why will he not delight in it hereafter? They really advance his glory here, and why will they not advance it hereafter? and why will he not raise a vast revenue of glory from the souls of believers, through the long period of their separate state? If he seeks his own glory in all his conduct towards believers here on earth, why will he not seek his own glory in his conduct towards them after they leave the world? And if he does design to promote his own glory by them after death, we have good ground to think that he will preserve their separate souls in a state of knowledge, activity and enjoyment, and reap a large revenue of glory from their holy and grateful services. These, however, are only presumptive arguments in favor of the life and happiness of departed believers. I proceed therefore to observe,

3. That the scripture represents the souls of believers as alive, active and happy, after they have left their bodies in the grave. Our Saviour, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, represents the souls of both after death, as in a state of the highest sensibility. He represents Lazarus as carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, and the rich man as lifting up his eyes in torment. We cannot suppose that Christ would have given such a representation of departed spirits, if there were no intermediate state of happiness and misery between death and the resurrection. Christ in his dispute with the Pharisees clearly conveys the idea, that the souls of believers are alive and happy after they have left the world. He quoted a passage of scripture, in which he calls himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and in which it is said that he is not the God of the dead but of the living. It is true, he quoted these words to prove the doctrine of the resurrection, which was the point then in question. But it must be considered that the Sadducees, with whom he was disputing, denied not only the resurrection of the body, but the existence of

angels and spirits. By proving that the souls of the patriarchs were alive after death, he completely refuted their false and unscriptural doctrine. Paul expressly declares that he expected to be with Christ in heaven immediately after he left the world. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." This declaration affords conclusive evidence that the souls of believers are alive and happy between death and the resurrection. And to put this matter beyond all doubt, I will observe once more,

4. That the scripture assures us that the departed spirits of believers are now actually alive and made perfect in heaven. Enoch, Moses and Elias, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are now inheriting the promises. The penitent malefactor is now in paradise. There is also a general assembly of the first-born in heaven, composed of just men made perfect. And the apostle John declares that he saw in vision the souls of those that were slain for the word of God and testimony of Jesus, and many others, who had come out of great tribulation, and had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, surrounding his throne, and serving him day and night in his temple. Thus it appears that the whole current of scripture abundantly confirms our Saviour's declaration in the text, that believers die and commit their bodies to the dust, yet their souls live and are happy through the long period between death and the resurrection. We may suppose as Abraham did, that those who hold to the sleepy, insensible state of the soul from the dissolution to the resurrection of the body, would not be persuaded to renounce their error, though one rose from the dead. It only remains to show,

III. What life believers shall live, after they commit their bodies to the dust from whence they were taken, and their spirits ascend to God who gave them. And here we may observe in general,

That they will live a heavenly life. They will go directly to heaven. When the believing malefactor expired on the cross, he directly went into paradise. When Lazarus died, he was directly carried by angels into Abraham's bosom in the world of glory. There is no doubt but that the Lord Jesus Christ heard and answered the dying request of Stephen, and received his spirit into heaven. When Paul died, he was, as he desired to be, immediately with the Lord. The souls of all believers do, at their death, immediately pass into glory, where Christ is, and God is, and the spirits of all just men are, and where they are made perfectly holy and blessed in the full enjoyment of God. Whilst they were in the body, they saw

God and divine objects through a glass, darkly; but when they arrive in heaven, all clouds and darkness shall be banished from their minds, and all their intellectual powers shall be brightened and strengthened, to behold the face of God in righteousness, and to see all the beauty and excellence of the heavenly inhabitants. Such a heavenly life will fill their hearts with transporting joy and admiration. Though they had read, and heard, and thought much about heaven, and ardently desired to be there, yet every thing will appear new, and great, and glorious beyond all their former hopes, expectations and conceptions; which cannot fail to fill their minds with peculiar emotions of joy, gratitude and astonishment. They will rejoice that they have found rest from their labors, their fears, their sins, their sorrows, and freedom from all their natural and moral imperfections. They will rejoice to meet and unite with their christian friends, who had happily arrived before them at the mansions of the blessed. They will rejoice in their new employments and enjoyments, and in the contemplation of ten thousand new and glorious scenes and objects. The new Jerusalem will appear indeed like a new world, and a world of wonders. They will behold their blessed and divine Redeemer enthroned in glory, whom they never beheld before. They will behold the beauty and splendor of the holy angels, whom they never beheld before. They will behold myriads and myriads of pure spirits, whom they never beheld before. They will see the general assembly and church of the first-born, which has been continually increasing for thousands of years, by new arrivals from the church militant. These new and glorious objects will deeply impress their minds, continually awaken their attention, and fill their hearts with the purest pleasure and holy delight.

Nor will their joy and admiration be momentary; for the glories and wonders of heaven will constantly increase, and excite new hopes and expectations. They will hope and expect to see their pious friends whom they left behind; their fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and their nearest and dearest connections in life. They will hope and expect, that millions and millions of the redeemed among men will be added to their numbers, and united with them in their blessed services and enjoyments. And they will joyfully wait for the general resurrection and general judgment, when they shall be made more perfect in body and mind, and know a vast deal more about God, about angels, about the whole human race, and all the dark dispensations of divine providence.

Such a life of joy, admiration and hope will the departed spirits live from death to the last great day. This will be a new

life, and very different from that life which they had lived here on earth, and perhaps, in some respects, different from the life which they will live after the great work of redemption is closed, the day of decision ended, and all holy and unholy creatures are unalterably fixed in their appropriate places of happiness and misery, and no new events and revolutions are to be expected in any part of the universe. Though we are greatly ignorant of the vast scenes which are now passing in the invisible world, and will pass in the invisible world until the day of judgment, yet we are still more ignorant of the state of all holy and unholy creatures after all the affairs of the whole universe shall be finally adjusted and settled. We know that such a time must come, and we shall be affected by it, whether we are among the happy or miserable. We may be sure that the state of the miserable at that period will be permanent and immutable; but it seems natural to conclude that the state of the happy will be in some respects altered. The apostle says, "Now abideth faith, hope and charity; but the greatest of these is charity." Good men, before they die, exercise faith and hope, and when they arrive in heaven, they may still anticipate future events with faith and hope. But after all things are finally adjusted and settled, there can be but little if any room for the exercise of faith and hope. There will be no great and important new scenes or events to be anticipated, hoped for, or expected. But charity, that is, love, will for ever exist as the source of union and communion among all the heavenly hosts, after faith and hope are diminished, or become extinct. As all things will run on in an even channel from the day of judgment to endless ages, so during that unbounded period, all holy creatures will turn their attention backward, instead of forward, and employ a blessed eternity in reflection upon the past, rather than in anticipation of the future. After all past scenes have been unfolded, and the characters of all holy and unholy beings have been developed and exhibited to view; these scenes and characters will all be subjects of everlasting reflection, and a mirror in which more and more of the power, of the wisdom, of the justice, of the mercy, and of the sovereignty of God, will be perpetually discovered and admired. This source of reflection can never be exhausted, because the intellectual powers of all created beings are limited, and never can take one clear intuitive view of all things past; they will therefore be gradually recollecting, reflecting and reasoning upon objects, scenes and events that are past; and never come to a full and comprehensive knowledge of them, in all their connections with one another, and in all their relations to God, who will for ever remain incomprehensible to the highest, as well as lowest orders of the

intelligent creation. These recollections and reflections will be fruitful and perpetual sources of heavenly happiness. Things seen are temporal, but things not seen are eternal. All true believers stand inseparably related to, and will soon be conversant with all the great and glorious realities which lie beyond the grave. It becomes them now to carry their thoughts into that world to which they are approaching, and for which they are preparing, and to live in the joyful hope of that eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, has promised them.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said concerning the state of departed spirits, that those of the human race are in a wretched and hopeless condition, who are destitute of the gospel. They know they must die, but they know nothing about the consequences of death. Though some of the heathen have a traditional belief of a future state, and of the existence of the soul in a future state, yet they know nothing about its happiness or misery in another world. Though they have some faint idea that some will be rewarded, and some punished, for their conduct in this life, yet they have very false and gross conceptions of future rewards and punishments. Their poets have indeed indulged their imaginations in painting the happiness to be enjoyed, and the misery to be suffered, by the souls of men in a future state; yet all their descriptions are entirely false and visionary. The gospel only hath brought life and immortality to light, and justly unfolded the invisible scenes of the invisible world, and described the happiness of the righteous, and misery of the wicked. Without divine revelation, no person, nor nation, can certainly know whether the soul be mortal or immortal. The heathen philosophers have exerted all their ingenuity and learning upon the subject of death and the immortality of the soul; but they have only plunged themselves in deeper darkness and doubts. Cicero, the greatest and wisest of heathen philosophers and moralists, could not, after all his researches, satisfy himself whether the soul were or were not immortal. He said he hoped it would be immortal, but he could not remove all his doubts upon the subject. In this deplorable state of ignorance and uncertainty respecting the dead, the great majority of mankind are now involved. They have no idea at all of the resurrection of the body, and no certain knowledge whether the soul survives the body. They see nothing but darkness beyond this world. They are without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world. This must render rational creatures, who are capa-

ble of reflection and anticipation, extremely wretched; and in this wretched condition we should have been, if we had not enjoyed the glorious gospel of the blessed God. How thankful should we be for this distinguishing mercy! And how fearful must be our doom, if we misimprove it!

2. Since it appears from reason and scripture, that the souls of men do survive their bodies, and do immediately after death go into a state of eternal happiness or eternal misery, it must be no small error to disbelieve and deny the existence or sensibility of the soul, in an intermediate state. Dr. Priestly and Dr. Hartly, who were materialists, and held that the soul as well as the body is material, maintained that the souls of men die with their bodies, and cease to exist from death to the general resurrection. Mr. Locke, Bishop Law, and Dr. Chauncy maintained that death does not destroy the existence of the soul, but only throws it into a sleepy, torpid, senseless state, until it is re-united with the body. Both these opinions are equally repugnant to the leading doctrine of this discourse, and to scripture declarations, and facts. We have abundant evidence that the soul neither ceases to exist, nor ceases to think, from death to the resurrection of the body; and therefore it must be a gross error to deny that it does exist or think, through that long period of many thousand years. I know that Bishop Law adduces a multitude of texts, to prove that the soul sleeps from death to the resurrection; but all those texts admit of a construction more agreeable to reason, to other plainer texts, and to the general tenor of scripture, and of course prove nothing to his purpose. He farther undertakes to show, that on supposition that the soul does sleep through the intermediate state, it will be no loss or detriment to believers. For when they awake at the general resurrection, they will be no more sensible of the long time they have lain in their sleepy state, than a man who has slept soundly all night, and awakes in the morning, is sensible how long he has been in sleep. But this is a fallacious mode of reasoning. Whether the mind ever ceases to think in natural sleep, is a question. I believe it does not. But supposing it does cease to think during sound sleep; yet there is a wide difference between its sleeping six hours, and six thousand years. We deem six hours of sleep as an advantage, rather than a disadvantage; as a saving, rather than a losing of time; because it is necessary to promote the health of the body, the vivacity of the mind, and the highest enjoyment of life. But after the soul leaves the body, it will have no occasion to sleep, in order to enjoy the blessedness and perform the services of heaven. There is no night there, nor consequently, any sleep. This being the case, it is easy to see that the sleep of the soul

through the intermediate state would be a very great and serious loss to God and man, which would be eventually known and regretted. God would know that he had lost the homage and service of believers, through the long period of their insensibility; and they would know, after they had awaked, what great and glorious scenes had passed in this world and in heaven, during the long space of time from their death to the resurrection; which they would deem an irreparable loss. But this sleepy doctrine is detrimental to both saints and sinners. It renders death more gloomy to believers. Though they can anticipate the repose of natural sleep with pleasure, yet it must be the king of terrors to anticipate lying in the dark grave many thousands of years, before they shall awake to light and life. On the other hand, this doctrine is dangerous to sinners. It tends to lessen, if not entirely to remove their natural fears of death and eternity. They would be willing to die, if they could believe that death is nothing more than a sound sleep for a long, if not an endless duration. This soothing doctrine had a baneful effect upon the French in the day of their delusion, when they caused an inscription to be set up over their graveyards, "Death is an eternal sleep." But though death be not called an eternal sleep, yet if it be called a sleep during several thousand years, it will seem like an eternal sleep to those who wish to have it so. It sets the tremendous scenes of eternity at such an immense distance of time, as to allay, if not destroy the fears of it in the minds of the careless and stupid, and embolden them to pursue the broad road to destruction.

3. If the souls of believers after death exist in a state of superior happiness, then all real saints have reason to be willing to leave the world whenever God calls for them. He has given them good assurance that their souls shall survive their bodies at death, and be immediately admitted into eternal rest. A lively faith in his great and precious promises is exactly suited to remove from their minds the sting of death and the terrors of the grave. Accordingly we find from scripture, that many good men have met death without dismay, and left the world in peace. All the ancient patriarchs died in faith and hope. Job lived in the hope of death. He says, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come." David lived in the joyful prospect of death. He says, "I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope: for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for

ever more." The primitive christians, in the prospect and hope of a happy transition out of time into eternity, reckoned that the sufferings of the present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory and felicity which they expected after death. Peter said to his fellow christians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Those joyful christians had no idea of sleeping in the grave from death to the resurrection, but expected, as Paul did, that as soon as they were absent from the body they should be present with the Lord. It was the doctrine of the immediate happiness of departed believers, that enabled Stephen to die so triumphantly, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The same doctrine has often since afforded the same light and consolations to christians in the dying hour. One and another has been enabled to say to God, as David did, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." We here sometimes see the aged and the young die in peace and serenity, with strong hopes of an immediate and blessed immortality beyond the grave. They may have good reason to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Some very pious persons, however, we may have reason to think, die under fears, clouds and darkness. For some good reason or other, God sees fit to withhold from them the light of his countenance, and the joy of his salvation. But it is much to be desired, that all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, should live practically prepared for a peaceful death. By this they will do honor to religion, carry conviction to sinners, afford a source of consolation to their bereaved friends, and happily exchange this for a better world. And in order to do this, they must set their affections on things above, and not on things below. They must have their treasures and conversation in heaven, and live as seeing him who is invisible.

4. If the souls of believers are made perfectly holy and happy between death and the resurrection, then those who have been bereaved of friends and relatives whom they believe are gone to heaven, have a peculiar source of consolation. They cannot mourn as those who have no hope that the soul survives the body, and exists in a future and happy state. When heathens, infidels, and those who deny an intermediate state, lament the death of their kindred and friends, they mourn

without hope. They can follow them no farther in their thoughts than to the grave where their bodies are deposited, to moulder in dust and corruption. And to follow them so far and no farther, must create nothing but dark, gloomy, painful thoughts, sensations and reflections. But those who believe that their departed friends have left nothing but their bodies in the grave, and that their spirits have ascended to God, and enjoy all the blessedness of heaven, can follow them in their thoughts, and contemplate upon them in the state of the blessed, with a mixture of sorrow and joy. They may sorrow on account of their own loss, and rejoice on account of the gain of their friends. Mourners are extremely apt to err in their feelings and conduct. They love to remember their friends as they were before they died, and not as they are after death. They follow them in their thoughts to the grave, and no farther. There they often find a melancholy luxury in bemoaning and lamenting their own loss. This makes many so fond of depositing their dead in tombs, that they may often go and see their bodies; and this same luxury led the Egyptians to embalm the bodies of the dead. But Abraham acted a wiser part, in burying his dead in the dust, out of sight. If mourners would enjoy the consolation which the gospel affords them, they would much oftener carry their thoughts to heaven than to the grave, and follow the departed spirits of their pious friends to the mansions of bliss, and rejoice with them in their perfectly holy and happy state. It is one of the peculiar benefits which christians may derive from being bereaved of christian friends, that such bereavements tend to turn their attention from things seen to things unseen, and from things temporal to things eternal; which is suited to make their hearts better. A similar benefit may those who are not christians derive, from the removal of their christian friends and connections. They especially need to have their attention arrested and fixed upon death, judgment, and eternity. Unchristian parents may derive benefit from the death of their christian children; unchristian children may derive benefit from the death of their christian parents; unchristian brothers and sisters may derive benefit from the death of their christian brothers and sisters; unchristian husbands may derive benefit from the death of their christian wives; and unchristian wives may derive benefit from the death of their christian husbands. The death of the godly is very instructive, both to the godly and ungodly. It is profitable not only to mourners, but to others, to regard the death of the godly, whose spirits have left this world and taken possession of their heavenly inheritance. It is more instructive to see a pious person die in peace, than to see a sinner die in

distress. And it is more instructive to contemplate upon the departed spirit of the godly, than to contemplate upon the departed spirit of the ungodly man. This every good man and every bad man may know to be true by experience.

5. If death immediately transmits the soul to a state of everlasting happiness, or misery, then death is a most solemn and interesting event to both the dying and the living. Death among all ages and characters and conditions of men, is such a common and frequent event in this dying world, that but few seriously consider it, and lay it to heart. They generally view death as carrying men to the grave only, and leaving them there, and not as transmitting their immortal souls to a state of endless happiness or misery. They regret the death of a great man, or of a good man, or of a useful man, because they see the loss that a family, or a circle of friends, or the public have sustained; but they overlook the solemn and interesting consequences of death to the soul that is transmitted into eternity. In common cases, the death of a single individual is of little consequence to the living in this world; and they are little affected to see one and another laid in the grave. But if they would consider that death carries the separate soul to its long home, and determines its happy or miserable condition to all eternity, every instance of mortality would make a deep impression upon the minds of the living. It would admonish every one of the worth of his soul, and the vast importance of preparing for his future and eternal state. When any person looks upon a corpse, he may see himself as a dying creature, and learn that his body must crumble to the dust, and his soul ascend to his supreme and final Judge, and receive a sentence of eternal life, or eternal death. We are all dying creatures, living in a dying world, and daily admonished of our dying hour, by daily seeing the dying and the dead. We are in a more solemn and interesting situation, than any other intelligent creatures in any other part of the universe, because we have more to gain or to lose than they, in the space of a very few years, or a very few days. We are all under a sentence of mortality, and we know not how soon any of the aged or middle-aged, or the young, may be called to close their probationary state, and exchange this for another world.

A late instance of death here, admonishes all to stand in the posture of servants waiting for the coming of their Lord. The deceased* was in the morning of life, and undoubtedly had many reasons in her own mind for desiring to live; but God had

* Mrs. Claflin wife of Jeremiah Claflin.

higher and stronger reasons for putting an early period to her days. Though he determined to call her away from her family and friends, yet he graciously granted her seasonable warning and premonition of her approaching dissolution, which awakened her serious attention to the concerns of her soul. She soon found she had a depraved and obstinate heart, which led her to contend with God, and to oppose his terms of salvation. This involved her in anxiety and distress for some time. She found that all her seekings and strivings were of no avail in the sight of God, who condemned all her selfish desires and efforts to escape destruction. At length her struggles subsided, and she enjoyed inward light and comfort, which created a lively hope of future and eternal happiness. Her joyful views of God and divine objects continued, and rather increased than languished, till her dying hour. If she was not deceived, her departed spirit has reached the kingdom of heaven. But be this as it may, we know that she died in peace to herself, and in peace to others. Her peaceful death manifested the truth, the reality and importance of the christian religion, which can remove the gloom of the grave, spread light through the dark valley of death, and point the path to heaven. Surely the gospel of Christ, which can produce such happy effects and impressions on the mind of a feeble, guilty creature in the trying hour of death, is worthy of all acceptation to those who have yet to die. How many on a sick and dying bed would have willingly given the whole world, if they had possessed it, for the consolations of the gospel. How can any hope to die in peace and safety, who neglect to accept the great salvation provided for and offered to sinners in the gospel of Christ! He says to every sinner, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." This is a blessed promise of everlasting life to dying believers, and a virtual denunciation of everlasting ruin to dying unbelievers. Christ will as certainly fulfil his threatening to unbelievers, as his promise to believers. Let believers rejoice, and unbelievers tremble, in the prospect of death and eternity. Your bodies will soon be lodged in the grave, and your naked spirits fixed in heaven or hell. "Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it."

# SERMON XXVIII.

## COMFORT IN CHRIST.

JUNE 11, 1826.

As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. — Isaiah, xxxii. 2.

This chapter begins with a prophecy of the Messiah, and of the happiness which the godly should enjoy under his reign. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness; and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." This is a just and beautiful description of Christ, who protects and comforts his weak and weary followers, while passing through the storms and tempests of this wearisome world. How agreeable is a screen from the wind! How pleasant is a covert from the tempest! How regaling is water to the thirsty! How delightful and refreshing is a shade in the heat of the day! These are lively figures to represent the comfort which all true saints find in Christ. He is truly like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land; and such is this world to all who are passing through it to their eternal rest. They find great need of comfort in their weary pilgrimage, which they never fail to find in the Divine Redeemer, in whom all fulness dwells. This then is the agreeable truth to be illustrated:

That saints may always find comfort in Christ, in this wearisome world. I shall show,

I. That this world is wearisome to saints. And,

II. That they may always find comfort in Christ, when they are weary of the world.

I. I am to show that this world is wearisome to saints.

They are crucified to the world and the world to them, by the cross of Christ. They view the world in a different light from the men of the world, who have their portion in this life. Their treasure is in heaven, and they are only passing through this world to take possession of it. Those scenes and objects, therefore, which are enchanting to others, are wearisome to them. For they love not the world, nor the things of the world, because they love God supremely, and have chosen him for their supreme portion. Saints in all ages have had a disrelish to the world, and found it a wearisome place. Jacob said, "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." Job said, "I am weary of my life." Paul groaned under the heavy burdens he endured. And all saints ever since have found the journey of life wearisome. It is not the complaint of a few severely afflicted and disappointed christians, but the voice of universal experience, that this is a wearisome world to the children of God. But to make this more plainly appear, I would observe,

1. That this is a laborious world. Solomon says, "all things are full of labor." This is strictly true. All the necessary conveniences and ornaments of life require labor. Employment was originally enjoined upon man. But since the apostacy, servile labor has become a burden. The care of the body and the cultivation of the mind require exertions which are a weariness to the flesh. There is no lawful employment but what may be, and sometimes ought to be, pursued with so much activity and diligence, as to weary either the body or mind, or both. Our Lord, who never deviated from the path of duty, pursued his work with diligence, and labored even to weariness. And all who mean to be obedient to God, rack their bodies and minds in the labors of life. The sun every day sets upon millions of faint and weary laborers. This is a tiresome world to all, but especially to saints who are the most diligent and laborious in the duties of life, and who desire leisure for retirement and meditation. They are weary of laboring for the meat that perisheth, and wish for nobler employments, which admit of no interruptions and create no weariness.

2. This is a troublesome world. Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. There is no place on the face of the earth free from trouble. Trouble attends every stage and condition of life. Storms and tempests, wars and famine, and a multitude of other calamities, are continually filling the world with troubles. And besides these, there are innumerable private and personal troubles, such as pains, losses, disappoint-

ments, and bereavements. This is a vale of tears, where the hearts of men are wrung with the keenest sorrows. And saints have a share, if not more than an equal proportion of the troubles of life. Jacob's troubles were great and proverbial. Job passed months of vanity and wearisome nights were appointed unto him. David was drowned in tears till he was weary of his groanings. Elijah was bowed down with darkness and despondency. Jeremiah was a man of sorrows. And the apostles and primitive christians were always sorrowful. It is certainly wearisome to live in a world where troubles are always to be seen and to be felt. And the longer saints live in the world, the more troublesome they find it. The pains and evils of life commonly increase as its length is protracted. Old age never fails to bring along with it infirmities of body and troubles of mind. And there is nothing more wearisome than troubles. Many who can endure labor cannot endure trouble. This makes the heart stoop, and weakens the mind as well as body. A troublesome world must be a wearisome world.

3. This is a dark world. What is past, what is present, as well as what is to come, lies involved in darkness. All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. No man knows either love or hatred, by his outward circumstances of life. Strange and unexpected events are continually happening, which disappoint the hopes and frustrate the designs of men. Kingdoms are rising and falling. Societies are increasing and diminishing. Individuals are passing from light to darkness, from joy to sorrow, from prosperity to adversity. A thousand small and imperceptible causes are producing great and adverse events. Religion and virtue are decaying, and vice and irreligion increasing, in one place and another; and all classes of men are continually acting the most absurd and inconsistent parts. Such are the scenes of this evil world, which are dark and trying to the friends of God, who attentively and anxiously discern the signs of the times. It was the darkness of providence which overwhelmed Jacob. It was the darkness of providence which perplexed Job. It was mysterious and distressing to him, that the tabernacles of robbers prospered, while he was loaded with calamities. David was envious at the prosperity of the wicked, and was ready to doubt the rewards of virtue and the equity of providence. Good men are often weary of conjectures, and despond under the darkness of divine dispensations. They are tired of living in a world which subjects them to continual anxiety and suspense.

4. This is a sinful world. Ever since the first apostacy it has been the seat of iniquity. All evil beings have made this

world the scene of action. Satan has fixed his throne here, and claims to be the prince of the power of the air. Hither he has collected his legions of evil spirits, who have been continually employed in working wickedness. Here Satan and his angels have perpetrated their most enormous crimes. The devil deceived, and, as far as he could, destroyed Adam and his posterity. He and his legions have opposed the kingdom of Christ, and done all in their power to injure the souls of men. They have reigned triumphant over the heathen world, and in the christian world they have blinded the minds of them that believe not. The whole world still lies in wickedness, and it must be grievous to good men to live in it. It was grievous to Lot, and vexed his righteous soul. It was grievous to David, and drew rivers of water from his eyes. It was grievous to Elijah, who lamented the universal degeneracy in Israel. It was grievous to Paul to see the Athenians wholly given to idolatry. In a word, all good men sigh and cry on account of the abounding of sin all over the world. They are weary of living in a world so full of both natural and moral evil, notwithstanding all the restraints God has laid upon it.

I now proceed to show,

II. That when saints are weary of the world, they may find comfort in Christ. They are then prepared to receive comfort; and Christ is always ready to bestow comfort upon those who are prepared for it. Good men are not always weary of the world; and when this is the case, they will not seek and cannot find comfort in Christ. When a person does not feel heat, he will not fly to the shade. When saints do not feel their need of Christ, they will not fly to him for support or relief. But when they are weary and heavy laden, they will repair to him for rest, which he is always ready to grant. If they feel the wind, he will be a hiding place. If they feel or fear the tempest, he will be a covert. If they are thirsty, he will give them the water of life. And if they are fainting with heat, he will be as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Whenever they are really weary of the world, let their weariness arise from what source it will, they may find relief in Christ, in whom all fulness dwells. In particular,

1. They may always find compassion in Christ, which is a source of comfort. Christ has gone through the heat and cold, the storms and tempests, the labors and troubles of this world. He knows what it is to be faint and weary. He knows the heart of a pilgrim and stranger. And he has the tenderest compassion for his friends in distress, or want. While he tabernacled in the flesh, he never saw an object of compassion but he felt compassion. He enters into the feelings of all his

followers in all their sufferings. This the apostle exhorts christians to believe. "Seeing then that we have a great high-priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." He feels all the evils his followers feel. If any offend one of the little ones that believe in him, he says, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. When Saul was making havoc of the church, and abusing his disciples, he felt all their sufferings, and asked their persecutor why he persecuted him. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Christ feels the same compassion for his suffering friends now, that he did while upon earth. Whenever they are weary and heavy laden, they may safely cast all their cares and burdens on his arm, who will never leave nor forsake them, but graciously grant them the balm of sympathy and compassion.

2. Weary saints may find comfort in the intercession, as well as in the sympathy and compassion of Christ. Christ ever lives to make intercession for them. As he interceded for his disciples before his crucifixion, so he still intercedes for them. As he prayed for Peter, that his faith might not fail, so he still intercedes for the faith and constancy of all his true followers. He makes continual intercession, that they may be either kept from the evils that are in the world, or may be supported under them. He knows all the labors, trials and sufferings of his friends before they experience them, and intercedes for them, that they may be safely carried through. When weary saints, therefore, realize the constant intercession of Christ, it must afford them ground of courage, fortitude and comfort. For they know the Father always hears the Son. His intercession is always prevalent. He obtains all he asks for, and he asks for all that it is best his friends should enjoy. This ought to give them contentment at all times and in all circumstances, as it did the primitive christians, who could say, "We are troubled, but not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; we are cast down, but not destroyed."

3. When saints are weary of the world, they may always find comfort in the strength of Christ. He can give power to the faint, and to them that have no might he can increase strength. He can give strength to the body, and strength to the mind. Weakness is the cause of weariness, and the weary

always want strength, which they may always find in Christ. Paul found this in Christ, which made him confident of persevering in duty. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." When he had a thorn in his flesh, of which he was weary, and for the removal of which he most earnestly prayed, Christ comforted him with this answer: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." After this he could say from happy experience, "When I am weak, then am I strong." When he was sensible of his own weakness, he repaired to Christ for strength, and always found it. It must be a source of comfort to weary saints to reflect that there is strength in Christ, and that he will always impart it to them when they really need it, and sincerely seek it. They may always take hold of his strength, which is sufficient to carry them through the wearisome scenes of this wearisome world. They may always renew their strength, and run, and not be weary.

4. When saints are weary of the world, they may find comfort in the government of Christ. The Father hath committed the government of the world to his Son. He hath given him all power in heaven and earth, and made him head over all things to the church. He hath set his king on his holy hill of Zion, and said unto Zion, "Behold, thy God reigneth." This must be a source of joy to the children of Zion; and so it is represented in the text and context, "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness. And he shall be a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." When saints are weary of the darkness, tumults, and confusions of the world; when the winds blow and the storms beat, they may repair to Christ, and rejoice that he reigneth, and holds the winds, and waves, and storms in his hand. It is only for him to say, "Peace, be still," and a calm shall ensue. But if he sees fit to increase the storms and tempests, they may be still and safe under the covert of his wings, and rejoice in the promise that all things shall work together for their good, under his government, who has set them as a seal upon his heart and upon his arm. Christ governs all things for the benefit of his church, of which he is as tender as of the apple of his eye. Hence he says to his friends, he that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye. The church is Christ's vineyard, which he constantly cultivates and protects. Hence he says, "I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment; I will keep it night and day." Since Christ has the government of all things in his hands, his people may safely confide in his wisdom, power, and compassion, to defend his own

cause, and to repel every weapon formed against it. Though the kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord's anointed; yet he shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. Zion has nothing to fear so long as her God reigneth. I may add,

5. When saints are weary of the world, they may find comfort in the promises of Christ. He has promised to give them peace, even in this world. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." And agreeably to these promises, he has ordered it to be written, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord; for they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." These great and precious promises, which Christ has given to his weary and heavy laden friends, may afford them all the peace and consolation they need until they arrive at their future and eternal rest.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. May the friends of Christ always find comfort in him, when they are weary of the world? Hence we may see the reason why he forbids them to be conformed to it, or seek to derive their supreme happiness from it. He knows what is in man, and what is in the world. He knows that the world is very fascinating to the human heart, and that his followers are in danger of placing their supreme affections upon it, which will divert them from the service and enjoyment of himself. Therefore he says to them, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." If christians suffer the world to get the ascendency

in their hearts, it will certainly prevent their deriving support and consolation from Christ in any of their troubles, afflictions and sorrows. Christ has told them, that in the world they shall have tribulation. The men of the world and the things of the world very often subject them to great and peculiar troubles and trials, so that they become weary of it. But they may become weary of it, and remain attached to it, which will effectually prevent their loving Christ, trusting in his promises, and rejoicing in his wise and holy government. There are thousands of poor wretched creatures who are weary of the world, that are so attached to it, that they choose to bear all the evils they suffer, rather than to cast all their cares and burdens upon Christ. It is an expression of the tenderness and compassion of Christ towards his suffering friends, to forbid them to lean upon the world, which has so often disappointed them and pierced their hearts with sorrow, and invite them to come to him weak, weary, and heavy laden, that they may receive the permanent rest which he has promised to give them.

2. If those who are weary of the world may find comfort in Christ, then the more they become weary of the world, the better they are prepared to enjoy his promised peace and comfort. As soon as any begin to love God, and become cordially united with Christ, they begin to be weary of the world, and alienated in their affections from it. As soon as they begin to find pleasure in God, in Christ, and in divine objects, they begin to feel a distaste to the world and to all its objects, which had once absorbed their supreme attention and love. Having found the pearl of great price, and the treasure hid in the field, they renounce those worldly objects which had captivated and disappointed them, and set their affections on things above, and not on the things on the earth. These appear vanities of vanities and a vexation of spirit. They are weary to bear them, because they find them to be obstructions to a holy, devout and heavenly life. And if the best things which the world affords are burdensome to christians, how much more burdensome must the labors, the troubles, the dark distressing scenes of life be to them! These are the winds, and storms, and tempests, which drive them to Christ, the covert from the tempest, and where they can enjoy that peace which the world cannot give, nor take away. To this refuge all good men have always fled in days of darkness and distress, and found peace, safety and rest. When the sorrows of death compassed David, and the pains of hell gat hold of him, then called he upon the name of the Lord, who heard and helped him; and this led him to say with gratitude, "Return unto thy

rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Paul says in the name of christians, "We glory in tribulations; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." All the troubles, trials and sufferings of christians are suited to prepare them to enjoy more peace and rest in Christ, than they could otherwise enjoy. When a man finds a covert in a great storm, he finds more pleasure, than in a fine fair day. So christians enjoy more real satisfaction and happiness in adversity, than in prosperity; because adversity leads them to the enjoyment of Christ, but prosperity to the enjoyment of the world.

3. If christians, who are weary of the world, may always find rest and comfort in Christ, then they may enjoy more happiness than sinners do, even in this life. Sinners often possess a larger portion of temporal prosperity than saints possess. They often think they are happier, and make others think they are happier, than saints. But there is good reason to believe that their boasting is vain, and deceives both themselves and others. For their happiness is neither so pure, so permanent, nor so satisfactory, as that of saints. The experiment and comparison have often been made, by those who are the most competent to judge. Sinners have often become saints, and been able to compare their happiness as sinners with their happiness as saints, and to determine whether they enjoyed more happiness after they became saints, than they ever did before. David acknowledges he was born a sinner, and for a time undoubtedly enjoyed the happiness of a sinner; but afterwards he became a saint, and enjoyed the happiness of a saint. He could appeal to God the searcher of his heart, and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." This is preferring the enjoyment of God before the enjoyment of the world. And he declares before God, that he should be happier in the enjoyment of him than sinners are in the enjoyment of the world. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." Solomon gives a stronger experimental testimony that good men derive a far more solid happiness from the enjoyment of God, than can be derived from the wealth of the world. After he had reached the zenith of earthly power, affluence, and grandeur, he found himself deceived and disappointed, and constrained by painful experience to declare, "Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excel-

leth darkness. Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding: for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand, riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Such is the pure, permanent, and satisfactory happiness of good men in this life; which as far excelleth the highest happiness of the men of the world, as light excelleth darkness. Though they enjoy less prosperity and suffer more adversity than sinners, yet in this troublesome world they enjoy that peace of God, which passeth all understanding, and which affords joy in sorrow, and rest in weariness.

4. If saints, when weary of the world, find comfort in Christ, then we may readily believe that those who have lived in the darkest times, met with the greatest troubles, and experienced the severest trials, have often arrived to the greatest degrees of holiness and happiness in the present life. If we may rely upon the truth of sacred history, we must believe that some who have had the largest share in the troubles and trials of this present evil world, arrived at the highest attainments in pure holiness and happiness. By passing through the most dark and trying scenes, they became more purified, more holy and more happy, than they could have been with less adversity and more prosperity. Did not Abraham become more holy and happy by his peculiar trials? Did not Moses become more holy and happy by suffering affliction with the people of God? Did not Job become more holy and happy by all his complicated trials and bereavements? Did not Paul, and the apostles, and primitive christians, become holier and happier by partaking of the sufferings of Christ and rejoicing in tribulation? These and many other good men have often risen to the highest attainments in piety, peace, and pure felicity, by patiently and submissively suffering the severest trials and afflictions. And the same causes are still suited to produce the same effects in the hearts and lives of those who live by faith and not by sight. All the storms and tempests and fiery trials they meet with in the course of life, serve to purify them, and prepare them to enjoy peculiar rest in Christ, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

5. Since all real saints, who are weary of the world, may always find rest in Christ, they have no reason to murmur and complain under any of the troubles and afflictions in which they are involved. This has always been a discontented, murmuring, complaining world. Mankind have never been satis-

fied with what God has given them, with what he has denied them, with what he has taken away from them, and much less with what he has inflicted upon them. The rich have complained that he has given them no more. The poor have complained, that he has given them so little. The prosperous have complained, that he has often interrupted their prosperity and disappointed their fond hopes and expectations. And the afflicted have complained, that he has laid more upon them than they are able to bear. All classes of men in all the conditions of life, are extremely apt to murmur and complain of the evils, troubles and trials, under which they are suffering. But why should a living man complain? He suffers no more than he deserves. God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is only if need be, that he withholds or takes away any favor from any person. It is only if need be, that he inflicts a lighter or heavier evil upon any of the godly or ungodly. Who then has any reason to complain under his present burdens and trials, however weighty or severe? We are all born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. We are all in a state of trial, and all sufferings are trials. We have no reason to think it strange concerning the fiery trials that are designed to try us. And we have still less reason to complain of the trials we experience; for we may all find rest in Christ, if we will only lean upon him and trust in him. God is highly displeased with the complaints of his people. He was highly displeased with Israel, who murmured that he did not give them water, that he did not give them bread, and that he inflicted so many deserved evils upon them, while passing through the wilderness. Nor was he less offended with Job, the pattern of patience, and with Moses, the pattern of meekness, for their hard thoughts and unreasonable complaints of his conduct towards them.

6. Since all true believers may always find rest in Christ, when they are weary of the world, they have no more reason to be anxious about future, than to be impatient under present troubles and trials. It is very unwise and sinful to indulge a painful anxiety about future, uncertain, imaginary evils and afflictions. David did this, when he said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Thousands suffer much more from anticipated evils which they never meet with, than from the calamities which actually fall upon them. This is altogether unreasonable and criminal; for it is distrusting the care and kindness of God, destroying present happiness, and increasing present misery. How many render themselves extremely unhappy by indulging anxiety about futurity? While they are in health, they anticipate sickness; while they are rich, they anticipate poverty; and while they are in prosperity, they anticipate

disappointment and adversity. But why should they be anxious about any such anticipated evils, which may never come upon them, and from which, if they do, they may find benefit. God has assured them, that he will never leave nor forsake them; that as their day is, so shall their strength be; and that all things shall work together for their good. Christ foresaw that his disciples would be liable to fall into the sin and folly of anxiety about futurity, and strictly charged them to guard against it. "Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And the apostle exhorts and comforts christians in similar language. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

7. Since saints may find rest in Christ when they are weary of the world, we may easily account for their being sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker, than other men in adversity. It is very evident that they are sometimes weaker than other men in times of trouble and affliction. They sometimes sink under trials that other men can support. When Jacob was too ready to believe that Joseph was dead, and despaired of the life of Benjamin, he sunk under his adversity. "Then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." In this instance Jacob appeared weaker than other men; but on another occasion he appeared stronger. When his brother Esau came out with an armed company, to destroy him and his family, he boldly met him by faith and prayer, and prevailed. Job appeared stronger than other men, when at first he rose above his complicated losses and bereavements, and said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But afterwards he fell into impatience and despondency, and appeared weaker than other men. David was entirely unmanned and overwhelmed in sorrow at the death of Absalom, which discovered his peculiar weakness. But he had courage and magnanimity to meet and conquer the giant Goliath, which displayed a faith and zeal and strength of mind superior to all other men. These eminent saints were sometimes weaker and sometimes stronger than other men, because they sometimes forgot God; and sometimes trusted in the Lord

Jehovah, in whom there is everlasting strength. When good men lose sight of God, they have no confidence in themselves; but in the exercise of a true and lively faith, they are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Hence Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me." When a certain prophet told him, that if he went to Jerusalem, the Jews would bind his hands and his feet, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles; and when his friends with tears urged him not to go, he boldly replied: "What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart? for I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." In the exercise of the same strong and lively faith, the primitive christians endured their fiery trials, and gained the victory over the world. It is a reproach to religion for its friends to falter and faint in the day of adversity. Let them only cordially and confidently believe that they may always find rest in Christ, and then when they are weak, they will be strong enough to endure all present, and to meet all future trials and sufferings.

8. Since weak and weary saints may always find rest in Christ, they have a much brighter prospect before them than sinners. They live by faith and not by sight; and their faith is founded on a rock, which the winds, and rains, and floods may beat upon in vain. Their faith in the immutable promises of God gives them strong consolation, through hope that is an anchor to their souls, both sure and steadfast, and entereth into that within the veil. They have light in darkness, joy in sorrow, and a consoling expectation that all their light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. But those who are without God are without Christ and without hope in the world. They have no source of permanent peace in this world, or the next. Their joy and laughter is momentary and vain, like the crackling of thorns under a pot. They are always like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. They have no promise of rest in this life, or in the life to come. God places the bright prospects of the righteous and the dark prospects of the wicked in a very lively and striking contrast. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit." Thus the righteous shall have hope, while the wicked are driven away in darkness and despair.

Now let me ask, have you ever found rest while passing through the various scenes of this wearisome world? You will not deny that you have found it to be true, that you were born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Though you have at some times and in some respects enjoyed prosperity, yet you have often suffered losses, disappointments and bereavements, which have been grievous to bear; but can you say that any or all of your weighty cares and burdens and sorrows have driven you to seek refuge and rest in Christ, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land? If your troubles and trials have produced this effect, you have reason to rejoice that you have been made weary of the world, and are in some measure prepared to enjoy future uninterrupted and eternal rest, where sin and sorrow shall never come. But if any of you have never been weary of the world, and fled to Christ for refuge and rest in the times of darkness and distress, you have to remember, that all the troubles, afflictions and sorrows you have ever experienced, have been lost, and worse than lost upon you. They have not softened, but hardened your hearts; they have not prepared, but unprepared you for future and greater evils and sorrows; they have not brightened, but darkened your future prospects; they have not fitted you for the enjoyments of heaven, but for miseries without mixture and without end. Whether you look back, or look forward, there is nothing but darkness before you. You are in danger from prosperity as well as from adversity. The world which you love is armed against you, and will infallibly destroy you, unless you withdraw your supreme attention, affection and dependence from it. This is your immediate and imperious duty. You have delayed this duty too long, and future delay will only serve to strengthen the cords of iniquity, and bind you over to a state of everlasting alienation and separation from God and all good. The way of transgressors is hard. Why will you choose to struggle through all the storms and tempests of this present evil world, rather than return to God, and walk with him in the strait and narrow way to everlasting peace and rest? If you are wise, you will be wise for yourselves; but if you reject God as your portion, you must have your part with the miseries of the damned.

# SERMON XXIX.

## DEATH OF SAINTS.

JULY 2, 1826.

PRECIOUS in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. — PSALM CXVI. 15.

IT appears from several expressions in this psalm, that David composed it as a tribute of gratitude to God, for hearing his prayers and granting him support in a time of sickness, or some other heavy affliction. Among other things of a similar nature, he says, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee deliver my soul. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." This train of thoughts naturally led him to say in the text, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." These words suggest for our present consideration this precious truth:

That God takes peculiar care of the death of his saints, whom he claims as his own. I shall,

I. Consider why God claims saints as his own; and,

II. Show that he takes peculiar care of their death.

I. Let us consider why God claims saints as his own.

God has an original and absolute right to all his creatures, because they are the workmanship of his own hands. He is the Former of the bodies and Father of the spirits of all mankind, and has made them all for himself. As the Creator of all men, he has a claim to sinners as well as to saints; but he has a higher and more peculiar claim to saints, whom he calls

his own in distinction from sinners. This is plainly suggested in the text: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." We never find this mode of expression in application to sinners. They are represented as belonging to the god of this world, rather than to the God of heaven. It is proper, therefore, to inquire, why the only living and true God claims saints as his own. There will appear just ground for this claim, if we consider,

1. That he has set them apart for himself, in his original purpose of redemption. When he formed the great and gracious design of raising up monuments of his mercy in this guilty world, he selected from the mass of mankind a certain number of the fallen race, as the subjects of his special, sovereign grace. He determined how many to save, and how many to destroy. He meant that his Son should not die in vain, but should eventually bring home many sons to glory. This was an act of wisdom as well as of grace. It became the only wise God to fix the precise number that should be actually formed vessels of mercy, and prepared for his peculiar service through their eternal existence. Now, all real saints belong to this chosen number. David said, "The Lord hath set apart the godly for himself." Christ just before his death prayed for those whom his Father had given him, in distinction from the rest of the world. Paul taught that real christians were chosen to eternal life. He said to the Ephesians that God had chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love. He assured the Thessalonians that God had not appointed them to wrath, but to obtain salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ; and that he was bound to give thanks to God, because he had chosen them from the beginning unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. This eternal choice of the godly gives God a peculiar right to claim them as his peculiar people. As he had a right to make the choice, so he has a right to claim the chosen; and they are under peculiar obligation of gratitude to acknowledge his property in them and sovereignty over them.

2. God claims saints as his own, because he has enstamped his moral image upon them. Though they were by nature children of wrath even as others, yet, God having chosen them to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit, has actually renewed them in the temper of their minds, and made them holy as he is holy. They have the spirit of Christ, and bear the moral image of God. They have put off the old man and put on the new, which after God is created in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. This renovation of the heart

flows from their original election to eternal life. God enstamps his moral image upon none but those whom he has chosen to salvation. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Moreover, whom he did predestinate them he also called, and whom he called them he also justified, and whom he justified them he also glorified." And on this ground christians have a right to say, "God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." God enstamps his moral image upon saints, as a seal, by which they may be known to him and to the world to be his. Accordingly, the apostle tells the Corinthians, "God has sealed them, by giving them the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts." And for this reason he warns them not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby they are sealed unto the day of redemption. Hence "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." By creating saints anew in Christ Jesus, according to his eternal purpose, God has a new claim to them, and may properly call them his, in distinction from the rest of the world, that lieth in wickedness and under the dominion of the prince of darkness.

3. God has a peculiar claim to saints, because they have freely and sincerely given themselves away to him. As soon as he sheds abroad his love in their hearts, they make choice of him as their God, and devote themselves to his service. Like Paul after he was converted, they are ready to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" They desire to live to God, and not to themselves; and sincerely resolve, whether they make a public profession or not, that they will serve the Lord. They comply with the covenant of grace, and actually enter into covenant with God. All true converts do what the apostle says the Corinthians did: "first give themselves unto the Lord." This dedication of themselves unto God was required under the Old Testament, and is still required under the new. Those who give their hearts to God are required to give their names to him, and profess their supreme love to him before the world. After he has sealed them with his Spirit, and enstamped his moral image upon them, they ought to subscribe with their own hands unto the Lord, and surname themselves by the name of Israel. They ought to give themselves away to God in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten. But whether they have time, or opportunity, or resolution, to do this or not, yet they never fail to give up themselves sincerely and unreservedly to God, to be his friends, his subjects and his servants as long as they exist. An undedicated saint cannot be found.

All who have become holy as God is holy, and renounced the service of sin, have presented themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is their reasonable service. And since saints are the Lord's by election, by sanctification, and by self-dedication, there is just ground for his calling and treating them as his own, in distinction from those who will not have him to reign over them.

I now proceed to show,

II. That God takes peculiar care of the death of his saints. They are precious in his sight. They are his friends, his servants, and his children. He has a more than paternal affection for them. When parents send their children at a distance to gain instruction in some business, art, or science, to qualify them to be useful and happy in life, they take peculiar care to call them home at the proper time and for the proper purpose. So after God has placed his children in this distant part of his wide dominions, and has prepared them for his more immediate service, he takes peculiar care and pleasure in calling them home to his large family in heaven. And as the heavenly inhabitants rejoice at their conversion, so they undoubtedly rejoice at their glorification, which commences at death. Since this is a very important event, we may well conclude that God will take peculiar care in the course of providence, to order all circumstances respecting it in the wisest and best manner.

Here then it may be observed,

1. He always takes care *when* his saints shall die.

Though he does not exempt them from dying, the common lot of humanity, yet he takes particular care of their dying hour. While they live, they are exposed to all the diseases and accidents to which the rest of the world are liable. But he keeps his watchful eye upon them, amidst the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noonday. He spreads his broad hand over them, and keeps their eyes from tears, their feet from falling, and their souls from death, until the appointed time of their change is come. And he has appointed that their change shall not come until they have experienced a change of heart. The time of death is as important to saints as the salvation of their souls. For should any fatal disease or accident befall them before they have made their peace with God, they would be ruined for ever. Had Paul died before he went to Damascus and met with the saving grace of God, his case would have been as fatal as that of Judas. How many have been made subjects of saving grace after they have come to years of maturity; how many after they come to the meridian of life; and how many even in old age! Death in infancy would have prevented the salvation

of such persons. Hence God takes peculiar care that those whom he has chosen to salvation should be effectually preserved from all the arrows of death flying around them, until they are prepared for heaven. He guards them when they go out and when they come in, when they lie down and when they rise up; and suffers no fatal evil to come nigh them, until they have become reconciled to him upon the terms of the gospel. Nor does he suffer death to take them out of the world, before they have done all the good which he had for them to do in this life. He forms them for his own service, and designs they shall be the salt of the earth and light of the world, while they live in it. He employs them as free, voluntary instruments of promoting the temporal and spiritual good of mankind. He appoints to all saints their times of service. To some he appoints a shorter and to others a longer period of labor, and never calls any out of his vineyard, until they have finished the work which he gave them to do. Their time of service is highly interesting to him, to the world, and to themselves; and therefore he takes peculiar care when they shall die.

2. God takes care that his saints shall die, not only at the best time, but under the best circumstances. He is the only competent judge of these things, and often displays peculiar wisdom, goodness and sovereignty, in disappointing the desires and hopes of saints respecting the circumstances of their leaving the world. They often imagine that the circumstances of their death might be better ordered, and their friends often entertain the same opinion. But as God knows the best time, so he knows the best circumstances, of every instance of mortality; and he always orders these in the wisest and best manner, in respect to the death of his saints. He directs that one of his saints shall come to the grave by the mere infirmities of old age, as a shock of corn fully ripe in its season. He directs that one of his children shall die by a slow, piercing, painful sickness, and that another shall be called out of time into eternity by a sudden and unexpected stroke, without any premonition or warning of his last hour. He directs that some of his saints shall die at home, surrounded by their friends and acquaintance and every desirable circumstance; but that others shall die far from home, and far from all their acquaintance, die relatives and friends. He directs that some of his saints shall in the full vigor of all their rational powers, and with delightful views of heavenly and divine objects; but that others shall die destitute of the light of his countenance, and involved in darkness, doubts and despondency respecting their happy state beyond the grave. In a word, God orders all the vast variety of circumstances attending the death of his saints. But in all

this variety, he has a just regard to his own glory, to the good of the dying, and to the good of the living. Not a single circumstance happens by chance, but every one is ordered by unerring wisdom and perfect goodness, and designed to answer some wise and benevolent end. And it is easy to see, that, by calling his saints from the stage of life under such a vast variety of circumstances, God may accomplish as great a variety of important purposes. For the circumstances in which the excellent of the earth leave the world, often make deeper and more permanent impressions upon the minds of the living, than their death itself. The eye and the ear affect the heart; and it is what the living see and hear, in respect to dying saints, that affects them more than their transition out of time into eternity, which they cannot see. Slow and lingering deaths may give the dying happy opportunities of instructing, counselling and warning those around them, and conversing with them. Sudden deaths may alarm and awaken the secure and thoughtless, who would take no notice of a less striking instance of mortality. The calm, peaceful deaths of saints give a beauty, a reality and importance, to vital piety. To see saints die in triumph as Paul did after having fought a good fight, and finished his course with fidelity, is animating to pious christians, and condemning to all unbelievers. And those godly ones, who have long been in bondage through fear of death, and die in doubt and darkness, read a solemn lecture to all professors of godliness, to be constantly preparing for their own final hour, that they may leave the world in peace to themselves, and to all who are spectators of their last act upon the stage of life. Now, God always knows what circumstances it is best should attend every one of his dying saints, and he takes care that such and only such circumstances shall attend his saints in their dying moments, as are best adapted to answer the best purposes. This is an act of covenant kindness and faithfulness to those who die in the Lord. I must add,

3. That God takes care of his saints, when their pure and immortal spirits leave their clayey tabernacle, and take their course to the world of light. He knows that death is a great and solemn change, and he will not forsake them while passing through it. This David confidently believed, and said, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Nor will God take less care of his saints after they are absent from the body, but provide proper guardians to guide them in the path to heaven. There is good reason to believe that he appoints one or more of his holy angels, to lead every pious departed spirit to the regions of the

blessed. We know that when Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Peter had his guardian angel; and it is very probable, that every saint has his guardian angel, who attends him through life, takes care of his departed spirit, and conducts him safely to the mansion Christ has gone before to provide for him. After this, God will take care of the newly arrived spirits, and give their angels charge to make them known to those, with whom they had once lived, and conversed, and were united in christian affection. Their employments also will undoubtedly be pointed out, as well as their due rewards allotted them. These important consequences of death God will take peculiar care of, and so order them, as to give the most perfect satisfaction to all the inhabitants of heaven. God for wise and good reasons has reserved the scenes and objects, the employments and enjoyments of heaven very much in his own power, and has never gratified his friends on earth with a clear and full description of their future and happy state. He has only told them in general, "that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." But though all saints will be perfectly happy after death, yet the degrees of their happiness will be measured by their holy and acceptable services in this life. They will be rewarded according to their works here on earth. Some will be placed nearer, and some more remote from the Lord of glory. Some will enjoy higher, and some lower advantages for gaining light and instruction. Some will belong to higher, and some to lower circles of just men made perfect. Some will have higher, and some lower employments in heaven. But as soon as God calls home to his heavenly kingdom all his saints, he will fill their hearts with perfect holiness, banish from their minds every painful reflection and anticipation, and make them completely blessed in the enjoyment of himself, and wipe away all tears from their eyes. Hence it is written for the consolation of all living saints, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." Thus precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints, in respect to the time, the circumstances, and happy consequences of exchanging time for eternity.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God treats his saints in such a manner as has been said, then we may learn the extent of his sovereignty towards all mankind. Though divine sovereignty is one of the plain-

est doctrines of the gospel, yet it is so disagreeable to the human heart, that many are very unwilling to believe and acknowledge it, in its fullest extent. They will allow that he acts as a sovereign in creating, preserving, and governing the natural world; but they will not allow that he acts as a sovereign in governing the moral world. But it appears from what has been said concerning his conduct towards his saints, that he acts as a sovereign in his disposal of the whole human race. His sovereignty towards his saints begins in eternity. He chose them to salvation before the foundation of the world, and set them apart for himself, in distinction from all the rest of mankind. He continues his sovereignty towards them through life. He determines when and where they shall be born, where and how long they shall live, what diseases, dangers, and accidents they shall escape, when and where they shall meet with a saving change, when and where they shall die, what circumstances shall precede and attend their dying moments, what angels shall convey their pure departed spirits to the kingdom of heaven, and put them into the mansions which Christ has prepared for them. Such is the extent of God's sovereignty over his saints; and it is no less extensive over the rest of mankind, who are not and never will be saints. Over these he exercised his amiable and awful sovereignty before the foundation of the world, not by electing them to eternal life, but by ordaining them to final condemnation, through impenitence and unbelief. He continues his sovereignty towards them through life. He determines when and where they shall be born, where and how long they shall live, what diseases, dangers, and accidents shall befall them, when and where they shall die, what circumstances shall precede and attend their dying moments, and what evil angels shall seize their departed spirits and confine them in the regions of despair. Such is the full extent of God's sovereignty over the whole human race. He has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. What if some do not believe the doctrine of divine sovereignty in such an extensive latitude? Shall their unbelief prove it false? No; it shall prove it to be true. So the apostle Peter declares. "Wherefore it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you, therefore, which believe, he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed." All who disbelieve, deny and oppose the doctrine

of God's sovereignty in decreeing the character and conditions of all mankind from eternity, feel and speak and act just as God fore-ordained, and has foretold, that they would feel and speak and act; and of course all their objections are so many arguments in favor of the doctrine they disbelieve, deny and oppose. They must, therefore, become cordially reconciled to the doctrine, or the doctrine will cause them to stumble and fall and perish.

2. In the view of this subject, we may see that real saints have a permanent source of comfort, to which all who disbelieve and reject the gospel are entire strangers. The men of the world have no assurance that God has chosen them to salvation, set them apart for himself, and will guard and guide them to and through death unto eternal life. While God is preserving their lives and granting their requests, he is sending leanness into their souls. Both prosperity and adversity are preparing them for a painful death and miserable eternity. They are without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world. They are all their life time subject to bondage through fear of death, which may drive them away in their iniquities, and sink them in hopeless ruin. These are the wicked, who have no solid nor lasting ground of peace. They are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. They are utter strangers to that peace which passeth all understanding, and which is a constant source of solid happiness to the righteous, whom God claims as his own, and takes special care of through life, through death, and through every period of their existence. Paul was one whom God had set apart for himself, and he could confidently say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him, against that day. And he was no less confident of the perpetual peace and security of his fellow christians; for he says to them, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." These great and precious promises comprise all the blessings which christians need in this life, and which they can enjoy in the life to come.

3. Since God claims all real christians as his own, and always takes a gracious care of them, they ought to make their calling and election sure to themselves. They are absolutely secure in his view, and they ought to be absolutely secure in their own view. He has given abundant evidence of their security. He has from eternity chosen them to eternal life. He has

shed abroad his love in their hearts, and sealed them unto the day of redemption. He has given them great and precious promises of his love, his care, and protection. He has cared for them, guided and guarded them against innumerable seen and unseen dangers. He has given them the spirit of adoption, and enabled them to cry Abba, Father. He has commanded them to examine themselves whether they are in the faith; to prove their own selves; to know their own selves; to keep their hearts with all diligence; and to repel all the fiery darts of the wicked one. These injunctions they ought to obey; and if they had duly obeyed them, they would have made their calling and election sure. But how many real christians neglect this duty, involve themselves in doubts and fears, and walk in darkness and see no light! This argues something wrong in their hearts, for which they can find no good excuse. If they plead the deceitfulness of their own hearts, this will not excuse them. If they plead the hidings of God's face, this will not excuse them. If they plead the multiplicity of the cares and concerns of life, this will not excuse them. If they plead the diverse and contradictory opinions among ministers and others, this will not excuse them. Or if they plead the subtilty of the great deceiver, this will not excuse them. They have the law and the testimony; that is, the word of God, by which they may and ought to try themselves, and gain a full assurance of hope. They have no right to refuse to be enlightened and comforted, while they hold the Bible in their hands, and sit under the preaching of the gospel. They are chargeable with ingratitude, for what he has done for them and said to them. They dishonor religion by their doubts and fears. They deprive themselves of that peace and comfort which they ought to enjoy. They unfit themselves for every religious duty, and for a peaceful and joyful death. It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed.

4. If the death of saints be precious in the sight of the Lord, then it ought to be precious and desirable in their own sight. They ought to live in hope, and not in fear of death. Job did not wish to live alway, but waited patiently until the appointed time of his death should come. Paul said he died daily. He lived in the desire, as well as in the expectation of his dying hour. And he says, that not only he, but his fellow christians viewed death as a precious and desirable event. "For we know," he confidently declares, "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with

our house which is from heaven. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him." They gave diligence to make their calling and election sure; and they did make it sure, that they were elected, and set apart for God and accepted of him. Hence they could adopt the language of the apostle and say, we are now ready to be offered, and the time of our departure is at hand. We have fought a good fight, we have finished our course, we have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give us at that day: and not to us only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. God views the death of his saints as precious, and he has made rich provision for them, that they may view it as precious. He has placed death among his covenant blessings; and it is only for them to make sure their title to them, and they may be certain not only of a safe, but of a peaceful and precious death. If christians would only keep themselves in the love of God, and live by that faith which makes future things present, and invisible things visible, they would always stand in the posture of faithful servants waiting and hoping for the coming of their Lord.

5. Since God claims saints as his own, and takes peculiar care of them both living and dying, it infinitely concerns sinners to become saints, and live a holy and devout life. They are born to die, as well as saints. They, as well as saints, need the favor and blessing of God both in this life and in that which is to come. But it is impossible that they should secure the favor and presence of God in life and in death, without becoming reconciled to him upon the terms of the gospel, and living a pious and obedient life. Without piety, they cannot enjoy God in life, in death, nor in eternity. Without holiness no man can see the Lord. All their interests for time and eternity are suspended upon their becoming saints in this world, and living in obedience to the commands of God, which he has given them for their good. Hence Moses in his dying address to his people said unto them, "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, to do all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life." Who would not wish as Balaam did, that he might die the death of the righteous? Who would not wish to enjoy a peaceful death and a blessed immortality? But these infinitely desirable and important blessings are promised

to the saints only, and upon the saints only will they ever be bestowed. The enemies of God must become his friends, before they can enjoy his favor, and his loving kindness, which is better than life. How many in a dying hour have bitterly lamented their neglect of making their peace with God, till all hope was lost! God sincerely and ardently desires that sinners would become reconciled to him, that their death might be precious in his sight. "O," says he, "that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"

6. If God takes peculiar care of saints in life, and often gives them a peaceful death, then their death ought to be peculiarly regarded as very precious and instructive. A peaceful death is not very often to be seen. Many more die in darkness, than die in light. Many more die in fear than die in hope. Hope in death is one of the peculiar favors which God graciously grants to his saints, whom he claims as his own. Hence says Solomon, "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death." It is only the path of the just that shineth more and more unto the perfect day; and when such as have shone in life shine in death, their death is precious and peculiarly instructive, and deserves uncommon notice. This God requires. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace." It displays a strong and lively faith in God, to meet the king of terrors in hope, without dismay. Such a death can hardly fail to give a realizing and impressive sense to relatives, friends, and all surrounding spectators, of two of the most interesting objects in the invisible world, the future blessedness of the righteous, and the future misery of the unrighteous. How precious and instructive was the death of David, whose last words were, "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: this is all my salvation, and all my desire." How precious and instructive was the death of pious Simeon, when he could say in the exercise of a lively hope of future blessedness, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!" The peaceful death of saints is very precious and instructive to surviving christians. It reminds them of their duty, confirms their faith, and brightens their future and eternal prospects. The peaceful death of the godly does not appear so precious to the ungodly; but nevertheless it may make as deep and salutary impressions on their minds. It carries the most sensible conviction to the consciences of all who are destitute of vital piety, that they are

unfit to die, unfit for heaven, and fit only for the everlasting society and state of the incorrigible enemies of God and of all good, which is awfully alarming. It must be owing, therefore, to the fault of both saints and sinners, if they do not lay to heart every peaceful death of the godly, and derive instruction and benefit from every such solemn scene that they are called to witness. It gives them a visible demonstration of the eternal separation of the righteous from the wicked.

7. If God claims all real saints as his own, and takes peculiar care of their death, which is precious in his sight, then pious mourners have ground of support and consolation under the bereavement of their pious relatives and friends. They may be assured that God guarded and guided them through life, was with them in the hour of death, and has received them into his presence, where is fulness of joy, where sin and sorrow shall no more reach them, and where all tears shall be for ever wiped from their eyes. This is what he has promised all the righteous he will do for them. And this is what he is every where doing for the righteous, when he calls them to pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death. This ought to satisfy pious mourners, who are lamenting the death of relatives and friends, whom they deemed near to God, and knew to be dear to themselves.

These observations may apply to the late instance of mortality in this place. One who professed to be pious, and was viewed by others to be pious, has early finished her course, and gone the way of all the earth. We are incompetent judges of the real, and much more of the eminent piety of others. Christ was a perfect judge of piety in both these respects. He distinguished Peter, James and John, among the twelve, and John among the three. But without making any such distinction, we may be allowed to hope that the deceased * was one whom God called his own, and whose death was precious in his sight. If this was the case, her pious friends (and she undoubtedly had such) have ground of consolation in her death, and in all the circumstances of it. These were somewhat peculiar and trying. Her disorder was singular and slow, and distressing in its operation. It bid defiance to all the efforts made to remove it. She suffered a thousand deaths in the apprehension of one, for she lingered long on a dying bed. But if she was a child of God, he ordered all these circumstances in wisdom, goodness, and covenant faithfulness; and they were adapted to do her good, to do good to her husband, and to all her relatives and friends. They have been called to pass

* Mrs. Patty Metcalf, the wife of Mr. Nathan Metcalf.

through scenes full of instruction, and calculated to teach them how to live and how to die. Some of them have long stood around her sick and dying bed, and seen her calmness and composure in the view of eternity. She is now separated from them; and have they not reason to ask themselves whether the separation may not be long and even without end? If she was prepared to die in safety, it deeply concerns them to prepare to die in safety. If she was prepared to die in peace, it deeply concerns them to prepare to die in peace. And if she has gone to heaven, it deeply concerns them to follow her there. The death they lament is not an ordinary instance of mortality; and the circumstances attending it imperiously call for serious reflections upon their own frailty, mortality, and the solemn importance of living and dying to God. They never will, perhaps, have a more affecting admonition to obtain the one thing needful. And should they rightly improve this bereavement, the afflicted husband may have reason to bless God that he was called to bear the yoke in his youth; and the afflicted parents and brothers and sisters may have reason to say that it has been good for them that they have been afflicted and bereaved.

The death of a young pious parent reads a solemn lecture to the young families in this place, who are destitute not only of the reality, but of the form of that religion in which they were educated. How many such irreligious families are there, and how fast are they multiplying! Though such families may banish God from their thoughts, and religion from their houses, yet they cannot prevent death from coming into their windows. And where is there a young family prepared for such an event? Be entreated to awake from your awful stupor, and attend to the things which belong to your peace in life and death, before it be too late. God has preserved your own lives, but has he not taken away one or more of your children? Or if he has spared their lives, he may not spare yours much longer. It is high time to give yourselves and your children to God; and you risk your own salvation and theirs every day you neglect the care of your own souls and theirs. Delay is presumption, and may prove fatal.

Though this is not a dying time, yet this is a dying world; and no one knows that he shall live another year, or another month, or another day. Every one, therefore, whether old or young, whether strong or feeble, ought to take warning from the late instance, and late instances, of mortality, and be ready also for being the first to meet death, and to give up his great and last account.

# SERMON XXX.

## ENTIRE DEVOTION TO DUTY.

JANUARY 11, 1824.

WHATSOEVER thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.—ECCL. ix. 10.

THIS is an independent sentence, which, without any comment, naturally leads us to consider three things.

I. How men ought to find out their duty.

II. What is implied in doing their duty with their might.

III. Why they should do it in this manner.

I. Let us consider how men ought to find out what they have to do in this world. They all come into the world ignorant of what they have to do in it. But the wise man supposes that every one may find out what he has to do in particular. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." This is an address to every particular person, and an express command to find out his own duty. The question now is, how every person may find out what his duty is, while acting upon the stage of life. The days of inspiration are past, and none have any ground to expect that God will teach them their duty, without their improving the means they have to discover it. These means are various and sufficient. For,

1. Men may find out their duty by reading the word of God. He has therein plainly pointed out the end for which he formed them rational and immortal creatures, and the principal duties they have to perform. The apostle says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all

good works." By searching the scriptures, every person of every character and condition may discover "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," which he ought to follow. It was by the scriptures that Christ discovered his duty as a man and as Mediator. He grew in knowledge and wisdom like other children of men. As soon as he could read the Bible, he discovered what business his Father had given him to do in the world. Just so all men may discover their duty by reading the word of God, with a sincere desire to know it. The Bible points out the duty of parents and children, of masters and servants, of rulers and subjects, of the rich and the poor, and of all persons in every situation, relation, and connection of life. It is able to make all wise unto salvation.

2. Men may find out what they have do in this world, by hearing, as well as by reading the word of God. He has appointed men to preach his word, and to explain and inculcate the duties contained in it. The duty of ministers to preach, implies the duty of people to hear the word of God. This is a price which he has put into their hands to get wisdom; and if they properly improve it, they can hardly fail of gaining the knowledge of their duty in many doubtful and difficult cases. God never intended to make men's duty so plain in his word, as to render it unnecessary for them to hear it explained and enforced by religious instructers. The prophet says, "the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and the people should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts."

3. Men may find out their duty by duly regarding the dispensations of divine providence towards them. Many of the duties of life result from the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed. God deals very differently with different persons, and very differently with the same persons at different times. Their duties always vary as their circumstances vary. New duties always arise from new situations, relations, connections, and external circumstances. If men will properly regard God's dealings towards them from time to time, and from day to day, they may find out what their hearts and hands have to do from time to time and from day to day. God as plainly points out duty to men by his providence, as by his word, and it is as necessary that they should regard what he says to them in his providence, as in his word, in order to know their duty in the course of life. Besides,

4. There is another way in which they may discover their duty; and that is, by asking counsel of God. The apostle says, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who

giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." How often did David pray that God would teach him his statutes! When Solomon felt like a little child in respect to the knowledge of his duty, he prayed that God would give him "a wise and understanding heart." And he enjoined it upon others to follow his example and acknowledge God in all their ways, and assures them that he will direct their paths. God can, by the influence of his Spirit, enlighten men's understandings, and cause them to discern their duty as exhibited in his word and providence. And if they will properly seek for divine wisdom and direction, they may justly expect to be led in the strait path of duty. For "the meek he will guide in judgment; and the meek he will teach his way." By some or all the ways which have been mentioned, men may always find out what they have to do in the world. I proceed to show,

II. What is implied in men's doing their duty, when they discover it, "with their might."

Might signifies power, strength and ability of every kind. This leads me to observe,

1. That men ought to employ all their powers and faculties in doing what they find they have to do. If what they find to do requires bodily strength, then they must exert their bodily strength; if it requires knowledge, then they must exercise the knowledge they possess; if it requires wisdom, then they must exercise their wisdom; if it requires prudence, then they must exercise prudence; if it requires authority, then they must exercise authority; if it requires influence, then they must exercise all the influence they have; or if it requires the exertion of all their natural and moral abilities, then they must exert them all, to their utmost extent. For every man's might consists in his mental as well as corporeal strength. And no man can be said to do his duty with his might, unless he exerts all his powers and faculties which are necessary to perform it. God measures men's duty by the powers and faculties which he has given them. He requires them to love him with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength, and their neighbor as themselves. This is requiring them to do every duty with all their might. It is true, every duty does not require the exertion of all their corporeal and mental faculties; but some duties do, and when they do, they are morally obliged to exert them all.

2. Men's doing with their might, what they find to do, implies that they should surmount all the difficulties that lie in the way of doing their duty. Though God never requires men to do any thing above their might, or strength, or abilities to do,

yet he does require them to do many things that cannot be done, without surmounting great and formidable difficulties, which lie in the way of the performance of duty. Every man finds in the course of life, some duties which are extremely hard and difficult for him to do. But in such cases, he ought to summon all his courage, strength, activity, wisdom and prudence, which are necessary to discharge the duty devolved upon him. Abraham undoubtedly found it necessary to exert all his mental might, when he was called to sacrifice his son. Moses felt unequal to go to Pharaoh, to demand the deliverance of his people, and desired to be excused; but God would not excuse him. He therefore girded up the loins of his mind and went forward, and surmounted all the opposition, dangers and obstacles which he had to encounter. David found it to be his duty to meet Goliath; he put his life in his hand, went, and slew the giant. Elijah found it to be his duty to go to Ahab, who had been seeking his life, and he went and performed his duty with safety. The prophets, Christ, the apostles, and the primitive christians, conducted in the same manner, and surmounted all difficulties and dangers that stood in the way of duty. They did whatsoever they found to do, with their might. And this is what every person ought to do, not only once or twice, or in a few instances; but to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the service of God, notwithstanding all the difficulties and dangers that obstruct their course. It only remains to show,

III. Why men should thus exert themselves to do whatsoever they find to do in the world. And,

1. They ought thus to exert themselves in doing their duty, because God has given them all their mental and corporeal powers and faculties for use. He has made all men for himself, and given them all their natural and moral powers to capacitate them for what he has for them to do. The more strength any have, the more they ought to exercise it on all proper occasions. The more knowledge, wisdom, prudence, authority, and influence any have, the more they ought to exercise these distinguishing talents in doing whatever of duty they find to do. No talents were ever given for the mere contemplation, amusement, or reputation of their possessors; and therefore they have no right to bury them, or pervert them. God needs them all, and requires that they should exercise them all in his service, with the utmost diligence, activity and perseverance. He does not allow any of mankind to stand all the day idle, but commands them all to enter into his vineyard, and faithfully discharge the various and important duties which he has assigned them.

2. God requires men to do all they do, with their might, because he has a great deal for them to do on the stage of life. He has much for them to do for himself. He carries on most of his designs in this world by the instrumentality of mankind. He feeds and clothes them, preserves their lives and health, and gives them most of the necessaries and conveniences of life, by means of their wisdom, prudence, foresight and labors. He governs all the nations and kingdoms of the world, by subordinate human agents. He sends war and makes peace by the instrumentality of the powers that be. And so far as he has revealed his designs in his word, or in his providence, all men ought to coöperate with him in carrying them into execution, especially in promoting the purposes of his grace towards this guilty and miserable world. God has a great deal for men to do for their fellow men. They are all mutually dependent upon one another. The weak are dependent on the strong, and the strong on the weak; the poor are dependent on the rich, and the rich on the poor; the sick are dependent on the healthy, and the healthy on the sick; the unlearned are dependent on the learned, and the learned on the unlearned; the low are dependent on the high, and the high on the low; the young are dependent on the aged, and the aged on the young. By the laws of nature, all men are connected together; and from this connection arise innumerable obligations and duties which they are bound to discharge towards each other. And whoever will endeavor to find out his duty to his fellow men, will find that he has a great deal to do for their benefit. This is a poor, needy world. All men are full of their wants, which require their mutual exertions to supply. Those who properly attend to the temporal and spiritual wants of mankind, will find frequent occasions for the vigorous exertion of all the powers and faculties which God has bestowed upon them.

Besides, God has a great deal for every one to do for himself. He has suspended both his temporal and eternal interests upon his own exertions. It commonly depends upon every man, whether he shall be rich or poor, healthy or sickly, useful or useless, good or bad, happy or miserable, both in this life and the life to come. Men have every thing to gain or to lose in this and another world. They have occasion for the exercise of all their active powers every day and every where, for their own personal peace, comfort and benefit. There are many things they must do for themselves, which none can do for them. This world is the great theatre of the universe, where all intelligent beings are acting their various and important parts. Here God is acting, here Christ is acting, here the Holy Ghost is acting, here good and bad angels are acting, and here

all good and bad men are acting. And as these intelligent beings are pursuing very diverse and opposite designs, so they are all soliciting every person to join with them. This lays a foundation for the most vigilant care and caution, and the most vigorous exertions of all men to do their duty in the face of all sinful and malignant creatures. They need to be always awake and alive, and to put forth all their might, to do all they have to do for God, for themselves, and for their fellow men. All the circumstances, relations and connections in which they are placed call upon them to do their duty with all their might. God perfectly knows what they ought to do, and he has given them powers and faculties to do that, and to do no more.

I must add,

3. God requires men to exert themselves to the utmost in doing the numerous and important duties which they find to do, because they have but a short and uncertain time in which to do them. This is the solemn reason urged in the text. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." This cannot mean that death throws men into a state of total insensibility. For the scripture gives us good evidence to believe that departed spirits survive their bodies, and retain all their rational and moral powers and faculties beyond the grave. We know that Moses and Elias appeared with Christ on the mount of transfiguration, and we read of a multitude of just men made perfect, who are now in heaven, and inherit the promises. Of Judas, also, it is said that he is gone to his own place. But if any good or bad men retain their rational and moral powers after death, we may justly conclude that the souls of all men exist in a state of sensibility and activity after death. The true meaning of the text must be, that death carries the souls of men into another world, and puts a period to all the labors of this life, and to all the knowledge and concerns of this world. Hence the prophet says to God in the name of his people, "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." And Job says a man after death knoweth not whether his sons come to honor or dishonor. The dead know nothing about the world and the things of the world after they have closed their eyes upon it at death. It is probably as much out of the power of departed spirits to look back into this world which they have left, as it was out of their power to look into the world where they are. There is a partition wall of some kind or other, which not only prevents us from looking into the other world, but equally prevents those who have gone into the other world from look-

ing into this. So that it is as impossible for the dead to see the living, as for the living to see the dead. It is, therefore, a solemn and interesting truth, that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, respecting this world. The dead can do nothing for themselves, or for those whom they leave behind in the world when they leave it. All their powers and abilities, and opportunities for doing or getting good in this world, are come to a final and everlasting period. They cannot retrieve any time they lost, nor perform any duties they neglected, nor rectify any mistakes they either designedly or undesignedly made, while they lived, though they have a clear and sensible recollection of all these things. And if this be true, men have but a short space of time for doing all they find to do in this world before they leave it. They have much to do for God, whose interests are so important and so generally neglected, and even opposed. They have much to do for themselves, to prepare for living and for dying. And they have much to do for their fellow men. Parents have much to do for their children, and children have much to do for their parents. Though the living know that the bounds of life are fixed, over which they cannot pass; and though they know not what even a day may bring forth; yet it is their duty to form purposes and designs, under submission to Providence, with respect to futurity. Though they may not take any anxious, yet they ought to take proper thoughts for to-morrow, or for days and years to come. But as they must soon, at longest, leave the world, it becomes them to be diligent, laborious, and persevering in the discharge of every duty; and yet, after all, whether they die young or old, they generally leave many things undone, which they desired, intended, and ought to have done. This the dying have often acknowledged and regretted, and those who are now living are in danger of the same neglect and mistakes. It therefore deeply concerns them to do with their might what their hands find to do. They have no time to lose, nor talents to bury. Let them work while it is day, for the night of death is at hand.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If men may always find out what they have to do in this world, then they have no right to plead ignorance for the neglect of a duty. This is the most universal excuse mankind make for their sins of omission and commission. If they neglect this or that duty, they are very apt to plead ignorance as an excuse for their neglect. They plead that they did not know that such or such a thing was their duty at such and such a

time, or under such and such circumstances. Or if they act contrary to duty, they make the same plea of ignorance. They say, that they did not know that it was wrong for them to say and do what they did say and do. Though involuntary ignorance always excuses, yet there can be no such thing as involuntary ignorance in respect to duty; because every person may know what his present duty is. Though many cases occur in the course of life, in which men are at a loss or in doubt whether they ought to act or not to act, or ought to do this or something else, yet it is still their duty to do one or the other of the alternatives; and no case can be mentioned or conceived, in which they cannot know their present duty, with the present knowledge they have. This may be easily and clearly illustrated. A man may be in doubt whether he ought to attend public worship. Doubt calls for consideration. Accordingly, his first duty is to consider impartially whether, in the view of all circumstances, he ought to attend; and if he sees reasons in favor of his attending, greater than the reasons for neglecting, his duty is to attend; or if he sees stronger reasons for staying at home, than for going to the house of God, his duty is to stay at home. And in his present situation, he must necessarily and knowingly either do or neglect his duty. Though men may, through involuntary ignorance, misjudge of what is wisest and best for them to do, in a great many cases, yet if they do what they verily think is wisest and best for them to do, they do their duty; but if they act against the dictates of their reason and conscience, they either neglect their duty, or act contrary to it, and cannot plead ignorance in excuse of their conduct. David, through involuntary ignorance, determined to build the temple, and he did what was right and acceptable to God, in making that determination. He did not know what was best, all things considered; but he did what he verily thought was best, all things considered, and therefore did right. But Jehoshaphat did wrong in going to Ramoth-Gilead. Though at first he might have been really in doubt about his duty, yet he could not have been in doubt after God had forbidden him to go. No ruler can plead ignorance for neglecting, or acting contrary to his duty. No parent can plead ignorance for neglecting, or acting contrary to his duty. No child can plead ignorance for neglecting, or acting contrary to his duty. And no man, in any supposable case, can plead ignorance for neglecting, or acting contrary to his duty. All men may always know their duty, by reading or hearing the word of God, or by regarding the voice of his providence, or asking counsel of him. They have no right, therefore, to plead ignorance in excuse of any of their sins of omission or commission.

2. If men ought to employ all their powers and faculties in doing what they find to be duty, then they have no right to do any thing but what they know to be duty. Whatsoever is not of duty, is of sin. Whatever is their duty is honorable to God, and beneficial to themselves and to the world; but whatever is not their duty is dishonorable to God, and detrimental to themselves and to the world. They have no talents to bury or abuse; they have no time to waste; they have no opportunities or advantages of doing or getting good to neglect or misimprove. If idleness be not a duty, it is a sin; if laboring to be rich be not a duty, it is a sin; if supreme love to the world be not a duty, it is a sin; or if vain amusements and recreations be not a duty, they are sin. Every human work or device which is not a duty, is sin; and all knowledge and wisdom which is not employed in doing or getting good, is sinful and displeasing to God. No intentions, desires or designs of moral agents are indifferent; but they are all either good or evil, holy or sinful. Men never act like the horse or the mule, without understanding, and without praise or blame. They are always under the law of nature, or under the law of God and of nature. Every thing they do is either obedience to or transgression of a law which either approves or condemns their conduct. Every person in the world is bound to do his duty, and nothing but his duty. God has not placed any of mankind upon the earth to trifle, but to employ all their time and talents in doing as much duty as they can do. Men have no right to do any thing but duty, in any stage or circumstance of life, whether childhood, youth, manhood, or old age. God has given them but one path to pursue, and that is the path of duty; and one has no more a right to deviate from that path than another, or at one time than another. Neither the young, nor the rich, nor the great, have the least license to pursue any other path, than the path of duty. They all ought always to know what God has for them to do, and to do it.

3. If God requires men always to know and do their duty, then they can never retrieve any of their lost time, opportunities, or advantages of doing good. The young are extremely apt to imagine, that they can retrieve the time they lose in the follies and vanities of childhood and youth. They intend to regain the time they lose, by improving future time and opportunities with redoubled diligence and activity. But they ought to consider, that they can never improve any times, seasons or opportunities better than their present duty requires. By their present negligence, they will suffer a loss, which they never can retrieve, and contract a guilt, which they never can atone for; though they should live and enjoy ever so many opportunities

and advantages of doing their duty to God, to themselves and to the world. If they live, they will always find duties as great as they can possibly perform, with all their might. But if they neglect duty and religion in childhood or youth, they may never arrive at manhood, and much less to old age. God may justly cut short their day of grace and repentance, for their sinful negligence and presumption. And there will be no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave to which they are consigned. Their loss then will be irreparable. Their account will be sealed up for the last day. So God has expressly told every vain, thoughtless, impenitent, presumptuous youth. "Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." It is not only the duty, but the temporal and eternal interest of the young, to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and devote their best days to the service of God and the good of mankind. Young people are as much exposed to mortal diseases and fatal accidents, as those more advanced in life; and it is presumption in them to boast of to-morrow, or depend on time which they abuse.

4. If God requires men to employ all their time and talents in doing their duty, then none can be released from duty as long as their active powers and faculties are graciously continued to them. There are many who are very enterprising and diligent in serving themselves, and laying up goods for many years, until they have reached or passed the meridian of life; but then imagine they have no more duty to do for themselves, or for God, or for their fellow men, and resolve to spend the rest of their days in ease and self-enjoyment. This is a mark of their folly, ingratitude and aggravated guilt. The time they have lost, the mercies they have received, and their unimpaired powers and faculties, lay them under increased obligations to perform every duty to God and man and themselves, to the close of life. So David felt and acted. He served God and his generation, till his head was covered with gray hairs, and he was just ready to fall into the sleep of death. And good old Barzillai would not be tempted to spend the last remnant of his life in the amusements and enjoyments of a palace; but wisely and religiously resolved to employ the residue of his days in living to God, and preparing for eternity. God does not preserve the lives, the health, the strength and activity of men for nothing. He has something for them to do, so long as they are capable of knowing and doing their duty. And very often their duties increase as their years increase, and their contem-

poraries decrease and go off the stage of life. The decays of nature and the infirmities of age, and the disappointments and losses and bereavements they endure, are a tax which they ought to be willing to pay for their protracted time and opportunities of doing good. The obligations of the aged are continually increasing, to do whatsoever they find to do as long as they live.

5. If God requires men to employ all their time and talents in doing their duty, then there is reason to think they are guilty of more sins of omission, than of commission. There are, indeed, some individuals among mankind, who trample upon all laws, human and divine, and run to the greatest excess in sins of commission against God and man. But the great mass of mankind, through fear or some other motive, refrain from gross sins of commission. They neither lie, nor steal, nor rob, nor murder, but do a thousand things which are beneficial to themselves and to the world. Yet these men live in the habitual omission of innumerable duties which their hands might find to do. They omit reading the Bible, calling upon God, and attending public worship. And though they pay tithes and perform many external reputable duties, still they neglect the weightier matters of the law; judgment, mercy, faith, and the love of God. They entirely and constantly neglect paying a cordial obedience to any one of the divine commands. They live without God, without Christ, and without hope, in the world. They love themselves supremely and solely, and seek their own good supremely and solely, to the neglect of the duty they owe to God and to every one of their fellow creatures, and even to themselves. Their understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; so that they cannot find out what they have to do for God, or for themselves, or for their fellow men. Of course they live in the continual omission of duty. Though God has sent them into the world to do nothing but duty, yet they stand all their days idle, which is highly displeasing to God. Accordingly Christ tells them that he will condemn them at the last day, for their sins of omission in particular. "Then shall he say to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not." The sins of omission are little regarded by the eye of man, but they are always regarded by the eye of God. All men by nature are disposed to go out of the way of duty, and to be-

come unprofitable. There are only a few who employ their time, and talents, and opportunities, in finding out and doing the things that God has required, and they have to do. They generally spend the whole of their precious and important life in this world in the total neglect of duty, and are but cumberers of the ground and abusers of mercy. How much more good might men do in the world than they actually do, and how much does the world suffer by their negligence in duty!

6. If men can do nothing for this world after death, then they ought to do all they can while they live, to leave it in a better state than they found it. They found it an evil world, full of sin and misery; and it is their duty to desire and endeavor to make it better. Every man who does his duty does something to promote the holiness and happiness of the world; and if all men would do all their duty, they would make it a paradise, and more holy and happy than if sin and death had never entered into it. Those who have done their duty in life have made the world better by living in it. We are now reaping the happy fruits of their faithful labors. Christ, and the prophets, and the apostles, and all good men who have lived and died in this world, have left us an example that we should follow their steps. Their benevolence extended to all future ages, and so should ours. They lived not for themselves, but for God and the good of the world; and we should live in the same manner, and do with our might whatsoever our hands find to do. God invites all where the gospel comes to enter into his vineyard, and labor for him and his people; and assures them that they shall receive what is right for their labor. If they gain five talents, he will double them; or if they gain ten talents, he will double them; or if they do the least thing for him, they shall in no wise lose their reward. If they will only place their interests in his interests, all his interests shall be theirs; which is the most precious and valuable reward they can possibly receive and enjoy.

7. This subject now calls upon all to inquire whether they are prepared to leave the world, and to commit their bodies to the grave, the house appointed for all living, and where there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, but darkness and oblivion. If they have done whatsoever their hands have found to do, with their might, from year to year, and from day to day, they are prepared to die; for they have nothing to do but to rest from their labors when they are called off from the stage of life. But who can look back upon such a perfectly well-spent life? No such person can be found. But still all may inquire, whether they ever found what God had for them to do in the world; and if they did find their duty, when did

they find it? It was a discovery and a very great discovery. And since they made the discovery of their duty, have they done it with all their might? Or have they been idle, barren and unfruitful in the service of God? If they are conscious of this, and no doubt the most laborious, diligent and faithful are conscious of great negligence, — the admonition in the text applies to them, as well to the entirely and grossly negligent, in its full force and obligation. Whatsoever your hands find to do, do it with your might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither you are every day going.

This especially concerns the aged. One* of your number left the world last week. His body is lodged in the grave. His work is done, and whether well done, we are not allowed to know. He was certainly very laborious through a long life. And if he was sincere in his family prayers, and in his steady attendance on public worship, he has undoubtedly gone to rest, though he neglected some duties, and a great one, of making a public profession of religion. His death is a loss, and a great loss to his aged, feeble, afflicted widow, whose case calls for the sympathy and compassion of all. His death is also a loss to his only son and family, and to all his children and grand-children. If they wish to find out their duty, they may discover many things in the life of their father and grandfather worthy of their regard and imitation. They have much reason for gratitude and submission. What this death says to one, it says to all, "Watch."

*Mr. Solomon Blake.

# SERMON XXXI.

## THE HOUSE OF THE GRAVE.

OCTOBER 15, 1826.

If I wait, the grave is my house. —Job, xvii. 13.

Job's afflictions were so sudden, so complicated, and so distressing, that his friends hardly knew what to say to him; and when they came to speak one after another, they said things very different, if not inconsistent. But whether they endeavored to sink or to raise his hopes, they mistook the means to effect their purpose. In this chapter, he replies to those who attempted to console him with the prospect of returning prosperity in this world. His case was too dark and gloomy to admit of consolation from any sublunary good, and he considers him who suggested the thought, as guilty of flattery. "He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail." And he told them all, "I cannot find one wise man among you." After this, he goes on to say, that he built all his hopes of happiness, not upon living, but upon dying; not upon the present, but a future state. "My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart. If I wait, the grave is my house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, thou art my father; to the worm, thou art my mother, and my sister. And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? They," that is, my comforters, "shall go down to the bars of the pit; when our rest together is in the dust." He would have his friends, as well as himself, wait for death, and remember that the grave was their house, as well as his. Though their lives and his might be prolonged, yet this ought

not to banish death from their view, because they were all hastening to the same end, and would soon lie down together in the same narrow, dark and silent house. The serious truth which now lies before us, is,

That men ought to keep it in mind, that the grave is the house to which they are going. I shall,

I. Describe the house of the grave.

II. Show that all men are going to this house. And,

III. Show why they should keep this truth in mind.

I. Let us take a serious view of the house of the grave, to which we are all constantly going. Though this cannot lead to any new discoveries, yet it may serve to impress upon our minds such thoughts, as we ought continually to carry about with us. Here the first thought that occurs is,

1. That the grave is a very spacious house. It already contains millions and millions of the human race. There are now a vast many more in this house, than are in all the houses on the face of the earth put together. The number of the dead vastly surpasses the number of the living. A large proportion of the four quarters of the globe has been strewed over with human bodies. Millions lie at the bottom of the sea. Millions lie in cities long since laid in ruins. Millions lie in the fields where battles have been fought, and where armies have marched and encamped. Millions lie in superb sepulchres, and more obscure receptacles of the dead. And yet there remains ample room in the house of the grave for all that are now living in every part of the world, and for all that shall hereafter live, to the end of time.

2. The house of the grave is not only very spacious, but very dark and dreary. This idea sensibly struck the mind of Job in contemplating the grave. "If I wait, the grave is my house; I have made my bed in the darkness." And he repeatedly calls it the land of darkness. The grave is, strictly speaking, a dark house. It shuts out all the light of this world. It hides from the dead not only the sun, moon, and stars, but all the scenes and objects of time. The dead know not any thing about those whom they leave behind, nor about the pursuits, the changes and revolutions, which take place among the inhabitants of the earth. Death draws a veil over all terrestrial things, and involves the dead in total darkness, respecting all the affairs and concerns of this lower world. Solomon suggests this alarming thought to the living man, to awaken his attention and stimulate his activity, while he enjoys the light of life. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest." The dead know no

more about the things of time, than the living know about the things of eternity. And the dead can do no more for the benefit of the living, than the living can do for the benefit of the dead.

3. The grave is a house of silence as well as darkness. The houses of the living are seldom silent. They sometimes resound with the voice of mirth and music; sometimes with the voice of sorrow and mourning; sometimes with the voice of praise and gratitude; sometimes with the voice of murmurs and complaints; and sometimes with the voice of animosity and contention. But in the spacious house of the grave, there is a constant and profound silence. "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master." Old and young, high and low, rich and poor, rulers and subjects, parents and children, ministers and people, all lie together in perfect silence, in the dark and gloomy house of the grave.

4. The grave is an empty as well as silent house. Other houses are often filled with rich treasures and splendid ornaments. There is a great difference between the houses of the rich, the great and affluent, and the houses of the poor and dependent. But the spacious house of the grave is totally empty of all those things which are esteemed the most grand, and beautiful, and valuable, by the living. The rich and poor meet together in the same dark and unadorned mansion. They must be stripped of all their possessions and treasures, before they can enter the house of the dead. This circumstance the inspired writers frequently mention, for the warning and admonition of the living. "Be not afraid," says David, "when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him." And the apostle gives the same seasonable admonition: "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

5. The grave is the house of corruption. There the sentence of mortality is literally executed: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." There the strongest and most robust bodies are dissolved and reduced to ashes. There the most beautiful forms of human nature are divested of their beauty, and become a mass of corruption and meat for worms. This humiliating idea impressed the mind of Job, in meditating upon the grave. "If I wait, the grave is my house: I have made my bed in the darkness; I have said to corruption, thou art my father; to the worm, thou art my mother and sister." The

worms are every day feeding sweetly upon those who once made the most brilliant and splendid appearance in life. Millions are consumed, or consuming and mouldering in the house of corruption. To such a state we must all be reduced, and in such a state we must all remain, until this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality, and death is swallowed up in victory. I must add,

6. The grave is the house of oblivion. It is designed to put the dead out of the sight and out of the memory of the living; and it has never failed of answering this design. No appendages to the grave can perpetuate the memory of those who are lodged in it. The greatest, the wisest, and the best of men are soon forgotten, after the grave has shut its mouth upon them. The nearest and dearest friends are soon obliterated from the mind, after they are gathered to the congregation of the dead. The bitterest enemies and greatest scourges of mankind are soon lost in oblivion, after they are cast into the house of silence and corruption. "They are dead," says the prophet, "they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish." Not one in a million of mankind, who lived and died five thousand, four thousand, or two thousand years ago, is now remembered. And in a few years more, the grave will reduce to perpetual oblivion, those who are now living and moving upon the face of the earth. If they wait, the grave is their house, and they must sooner or later be lodged in it, and put out of the sight and memory of those who are coming after them.

I now proceed to show,

II. That this house of the grave is ours, to which we are all going, and in which we must take up our abode for a long and unknown time. Some have lain in it several thousand years, and perhaps we must lodge in it for more than a thousand years to come. Job says, "Man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up; so man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep." But the certainty of going to this dark and dismal abode is the point now to be considered. And here it may suffice to say,

1. We know that this must be our lot, from the appointment of God. The apostle declares, "It is appointed unto men once to die." This appointment was the penal effect of the first offence of the first man. Then God said to him, as the head of the whole human race, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This sentence is universal, absolute, and

unconditional. It is like the law of the Medes and Persians. It admits of no alteration in favor of any class of mankind. They must all, in their appointed time, go to the grave, and crumble into dust, without any regard to their future conduct. The sentence of mortality is founded upon Adam's conduct, and not their own. "In Adam all die." "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." There are many natural evils, which God threatens conditionally; and these, men may avoid by avoiding the conditions upon which they are threatened. But the condition upon which the sentence of mortality is founded is past, and therefore there is nothing which mankind can now do, or avoid, that will have the least influence to prevent their going to the grave, which is their house, by an irreversible sentence of mortality. The righteous as well as the wicked must meet and lie down together in the grave.

2. Ever since God appointed death to mankind, he has been carrying them to the grave in a constant and uninterrupted succession. He has been fulfilling the threatening of death upon men of all ages, of all nations, of all characters, and of all conditions. Death has actually reigned from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to this day. Though men have ardently desired to live and to avoid corruption, and though they inwardly thought that their houses should continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations, yet we see "that wise men die, likewise the fool and brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others." Providence is every day reading lessons of mortality to the living, by calling multitudes of individuals from the house of life to the house of death. Besides,

3. We not only see mortality in others, but feel it coming upon ourselves. As soon as we are born, we begin to die, and feel those pains and infirmities and sicknesses which are the certain symptoms of death. The seeds of death are spread through our corporeal constitution, and grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength. All the means we use to preserve life, ultimately tend to destroy it. We must meet the king of terrors, for there is no discharge in that war. Though we wait, still the grave is our house. Though we outlive one and another, and bury nearly the whole world, still the grave is our house, and we must take possession of it. Though we put far away the evil day, and banish the thoughts of dying from our minds, this will not prevent nor retard the disagreeable event. Though we use ever so many precautions to avoid the common causes of death, and to prolong our days, still our appointed time will come, and we shall

meet the bounds which God has set, and over which we cannot pass. We must go the way of all the earth, reach our long home, make our bed in dust and darkness. Now, if it be true that the grave is our house, whither we are constantly tending, then it is very proper to inquire, as proposed,

III. Why we should keep this serious truth in mind? Though there are many things which mankind may and ought to forget, yet they should never forget that the grave is their house. There are weighty and solid reasons why they should habitually carry about with them the thoughts of leaving this world, and going through the grave to another. And,

1. Because God requires them to keep their mortality in view. "O that they were wise," says he, "that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" And by the mouth of Solomon he says, "If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many." God would have dying creatures bear in mind that they are dying creatures; that they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and have no continuing city, nor abiding place, till they go to the grave, which is their long home.

2. They ought to bear their mortality in mind, because God takes so many methods to impress this important truth upon their hearts. We have just observed that he requires them to consider their latter end; but he not only requires this in his word, but he gives them the most lively and alarming descriptions of human frailty, of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and of his own sovereign power to deprive them of the residue of their days, whenever he pleases. He has told them that in him they live, and move, and have their being; that they are in his hand as the clay is in the hand of the potter; that he woundeth and healeth, he killeth and maketh alive; that he has numbered their days, and fixed the bounds over which they cannot pass. These admonitions he enforces by concealing from them the time, the means, and the circumstances of their dying. He has not allowed them to know what even a day may bring forth, nor when, nor where, nor how they shall come to the grave. He sends death here and there, in one place and another, in one family and another, without any apparent regard to the age, or health, or character, or condition of those whom he cuts down. He holds up a constant mirror of mortality before the eyes of the living, not only in every month in the year, and every week in the month, but in every day of the week. The dead are perpetually falling around the living, and calling upon them to be ready also. And though he waits upon some much longer than upon others, yet he

reminds them by the pains, infirmities, and sorrows of life, that the grave is their house, in which they must lie and crumble to the dust. It is certainly reasonable for those whom God so solemnly and continually admonishes of their frailty and mortality, to die daily, and familiarize themselves with the thoughts of taking up their long lodging in the grave, which is their house.

3. They should do this, because it is necessary in order to their forming all their worldly schemes with wisdom and propriety. So Moses thought, when he prayed in the name of his fellow mortals. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." How differently would most men form their worldly designs, if they constantly bore in their minds that the grave is their house, and they know not how soon they may be lodged in it! It is certain, however, that men will form their designs for futurity unwisely, if they banish the thoughts of death from their minds; and that this event will in some way or other frustrate their purposes, and pain them with regret and disappointment. Dying creatures should form all their purposes under a proper impression of the frailty and uncertainty of life, and that it is only if the Lord will that they shall live, and do this or that. This is their duty, as to their general course, and as to their daily conduct. Though they are not to expect, while they are in health and apparent safety, that every day will be their last; yet they should feel and act as though it might be their last.

4. It is necessary for every one to keep in his mind the frailty and mortality of himself and of others, in order to form a just estimate of the world and its inhabitants. As soon as men are lodged in the grave, the world and all that is therein will no longer be of use or service to them. When they die, all the world will die with them. The habitual thoughts of death cannot fail to influence the opinion which men form of the world. A dying world does not look like a living world. This all know, when the thought of death strikes their mind, and they realize that every one is hastening into eternity. When this truth is realized, their false notions of the glory and importance of the world vanish, and they view these objects in all their emptiness and vanity. Hence it is of very great importance to maintain an habitual sense that we are dying creatures, and live in a dying world.

5. Men ought to live habitually sensible that the grave is their house, in order to prepare them to endure the trials and afflictions of the present life with patience and fortitude. Job derived great support and consolation under his trials and afflictions, from the habitual sense of his approaching dissolution,

when he should lie in the silent and peaceful grave. He felt weary of life and loathed it, and with satisfaction said to himself, "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return." The troubles and distresses and sorrows of life seem light, when life seems short, and death seems near. It is, therefore, a point of wisdom as well as of duty, for the living, while they are passing through this evil world, to maintain a lively sense that their lives and their troubles are coming to a speedy end. Thousands have lived, and are still living joyfully, amidst all their trials, in the full belief of this consoling truth. Each says with Job, "The grave is my house," in which I shall silently and peacefully rest. The grave is a happy asylum to those who are prepared and waiting for death, "as a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work." There is still,

6. Another more important reason for maintaining an habitual sense of mortality; and that is, because it will have a direct tendency to prepare men for death when it comes. Very few have ever been prepared for death without having a realizing sense of the frailty and uncertainty of life. Thousands have been awakened by a realizing sense of their mortality, to attend to the things of their everlasting peace, through fear of their soon being hidden from their eyes in the grave. And those who have made their peace with God have been greatly excited to prepare for a peaceful death, by making the thoughts of it habitual and familiar. This we know was the case with saints of old, who took peculiar care to set their souls and houses in order, when they had a presentiment that they were drawing near to the house appointed for all living. And there have been many instances, from age to age, of those who waited for death, and who stood with their loins girded, and their lamps burning, in joyful expectation that the time of their departure was at hand. The children of God cannot take a better method to prepare for a serene and happy death, than to meditate much upon their dying hour, and anticipate what it will be to leave their bodies in the dark and silent grave. This will powerfully tend to detach them from the world, remove the sting of death, and prepare them to pass through the dark valley with fortitude and joy.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If it be the important duty of all, to keep up and maintain a realizing sense that the grave is their house, then we may well conclude, that every way of thinking and acting is sinful,

which tends to banish the thoughts of death from their minds. In the view of this subject, we may easily determine, whether several ways of spending precious time are not really sinful and displeasing to God, though they are often thought and said to be entirely innocent and harmless. Many seem to imagine that there is little or no harm in loving and pursuing the things of the world supremely. They say, that they are commanded to labor six days in the week, and to do all their work; that they are forbidden to be slothful in business; and that they are required to do whatsoever their hands find to do in their lawful callings, with activity and diligence. All this may be done, and ought to be done, without loving and pursuing the world and the things of the world supremely. It is a supreme love and attachment to the world which banishes the thoughts of death from the mind, and the love of God from the heart. Worldly-mindedness is inconsistent with spiritual-mindedness. No man can serve two masters at the same time. Supreme love to the world always banishes supreme love to God. And, for this reason, the apostle forbids any man's loving the world supremely. He says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." There is nothing more stupifying than worldly-mindedness, or that has a greater tendency to exclude all thoughts of death and the grave from the human heart; and therefore it is highly sinful and displeasing to God.

The neglect of religious duties, though very common and fashionable, is very criminal. Those who cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God, and never call upon him in secret, in private or public, take the direct way to forget that they are dying and accountable creatures. Those who neglect to read and hear the word of God, pursue the same sinful and dangerous course. It is an old and true adage, that praying will make a man leave off sinning, or sinning will make a man leave off praying. Can you find any person who neglects religious duties, that appears to be mindful of death and eternity? No such person can be found. Why do any neglect these duties? The reasons they need not tell. It is because the performance of these duties would necessarily carry their thoughts to the grave, and the solemn scenes which lie beyond it. Their neglect of religious duties is a neglect of all their spiritual and eternal concerns. It is living without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world, and running the awful risk of being suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy.

Though many imagine that they may innocently spend their time in vain and trifling conversation and amusements, yet their opinions and conduct cannot stand the test of this subject,

which enjoins upon them the important duty of maintaining an habitual sense of their dying condition. Neither the young nor the old, who realize that they are hastening to the grave and eternity, can help feeling their obligation to regard the apostolic admonition: Let evil speaking, foolish talking, and jesting which are not convenient, be put away from you, and let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers. There is hardly any thing which has a more effectual tendency to stupify the hearts and consciences of all classes of persons, than that levity which they are so apt to indulge even on the Sabbath as well as on other days. The great and general levity among the rising generation especially, is a visible and alarming evidence of their disregard to God, and to their own eternal good. "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end." A deep and habitual sense of their continually walking on the sides of the grave, and the borders of eternity, would effectually convince them of the absurdity, criminality, and danger of appointing times and employing means to increase their levity, and hide the grave from their view until they find themselves dropping into it. This fatal effect of their levity and vanity is stronger than a thousand texts and arguments to prove, that the way which seemeth pleasant and right in their eyes is the way to eternal death, and consequently absolutely criminal, and infinitely dangerous.

2. If all men are certainly hastening to the grave, which is their house, then it is very unreasonable for any to entertain the thought that they shall never lie in that dark and silent mansion. Though none are willing to allow that they really harbor such an absurd thought, yet God, who knows their thoughts better than they do themselves, has told us that this is the secret hope and expectation of the men of the world. Because God delays to execute the sentence of mortality upon them, they are ready to imagine that he never will execute it. The Psalmist says, "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother — that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption. For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations. This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Like sheep they are laid in the grave, death shall feed upon them: and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning, and their beauty shall consume in the

grave from their dwelling." Though the living see death reigning every where, and cutting down the young as well as the old, the rich as well as the poor, and the wise as well as the unwise, they often cherish the thought that they shall escape his fatal stroke, and never see corruption. But this their way is the extreme of foolishness. It is absurd in youth to cherish this thought. It is more absurd in those in the meridian of life to cherish this thought; and it is most of all absurd in the aged, who have seen so many go before them to their long home. Job was not guilty of this folly. He said, "If I wait, the grave is my house." He maintained an habitual sense of his dying condition, and the longer he had escaped death, the more he expected its near approach. Our Saviour spoke a parable to convince the most stupid of the amazing danger as well as folly of putting far away the evil day of death. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying,"—to himself and not to others,—"What shall I do? because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" God knows what men think and say to themselves. And those who think and say to themselves that they shall live for ever, and not see corruption, have peculiar reason to think that there is but a step between them and death. They abuse the patience of God to their own ruin.

3. If all men are certainly going out of this world into the grave, which is their house, then however valuable this world may be to him who made it, it is of but little value to them who live in it. The earth is the Lord's, which he has made to answer his own important purpose of preparing rational and immortal creatures for another and eternal state. Men have nothing here which they can call their own. They are only tenants at will, and liable every day and every moment to be stripped of all earthly things, and consigned to the dark and narrow house of the grave. As they brought nothing into the world with them, so they can carry nothing out. This whole world is continually changing its inhabitants. The present possessors are all travelling to the grave, where they must bury all their earthly possessions, distinctions and enjoyments. They are vastly more interested in the world to which they are going, than in the world they are about to leave. It is of little importance whether they are rich or poor this side of the grave;

but it is of infinite importance, that they should possess durable riches and righteousness beyond the grave. It is of little importance whether they are intimately connected with the high or the low in this life; but it is of infinite importance that they should be intimately connected with the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven. It is of little importance whether God smiles or frowns upon them while they are journeying to the grave; but it is of infinite importance that they should obtain a peculiar nearness to him, and communion with him, as long as they exist beyond the grave. Christ abundantly taught and inculcated the duty and importance of men's being more solicitous to lay a foundation for their future, than for their present happiness. He says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." And again he said, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." After those serious admonitions and injunctions, he puts the solemn question to every one's heart and conscience, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

4. If the grave be the house appointed for all the living, to which they are constantly tending, then there is reason to think that the longer any have lived, the nearer they stand to it. As soon as we come into the world, we are constantly going out of it. Though mankind walk in ten thousand different paths, yet every path they pursue leads directly to the grave, which is the house in which they must all lodge at the end of their wearisome journey. Though they often imagine, when they are young, that their path does not lead to the grave and though they often imagine, when they escape some imminent danger, or recover from a painful and threatening sickness, that they are travelling from the grave; yet every step they take carries them nearer and nearer to their long home. While the young, the healthy, and the robust are going round the graves of others, they are rapidly going to their own. Those in the morning of life are going as fast towards the grave, as those in the meridian of life; and those in the meridian of life are going as fast towards the grave, as those in the decline of life; and all are going as fast towards the grave as the wings of time can carry them. But the longer any have been travelling towards the grave, the more reason they have to think that they stand at the very door of their dark and dreary mansion. If the aged will only seriously look back, and number the days,

and months, and years, which have rolled over their heads, they cannot resist the conviction, that they must soon exchange life for death, and time for eternity. How long and how often has God reminded them that the grave is their house! How many have fallen on their right and on their left, whom they have seen laid in the dark and silent tomb! How greatly has God favored them with long life and precious seasons and opportunities to prepare for a peaceful and happy death! The aged ought to view themselves, as they are viewed by others. Others view them as shocks of corn fully ripe, and completely fit to be cut down by the sickle of death.

The important question now is, are you prepared for the solemn scenes before you? In the first place, are you willing to commit your bodies to the dust? Dust you are, and unto dust you must return. The grave is your house, and you must occupy it. Though you have often gone round the graves of others, yet you cannot go round your own. It was a consolation to Job that he should certainly commit his body to the house of silence and of rest. He says to himself, "If I wait, the grave is my house." Though God should pass by him again and again, and take others before him as he had done from time to time, yet he consoled himself with the confident belief that his turn would certainly come, when his weary body should rest in the grave. This was a happy preparation for his dying hour. And none can be happily prepared for the same event, without being willing to commit their bodies to the dust, the universal lot of mankind. In the next place, are you willing to commit your spirits into the hands of him who gave them, and go alone into eternity? When your bodies return to the dust from whence they were taken, your spirits must necessarily ascend to God, and meet his sovereign disposal. God has made you for himself, and has a right to dispose of you for himself; and you cannot go out of the world in peace, unless you are willing that he should dispose of you for himself, and to his own glory. He has already determined where you shall be, what you shall be, what you shall enjoy, or what you shall suffer, through endless ages. And you must be willing that he should do his pleasure and fulfil his purpose, or you cannot be happy in any part of the universe. Have you carried your thoughts not only to the grave, but beyond the grave, into that world where you must take up your everlasting residence? Have you desired to be absent from the body, that you might be present with the Lord? Such views and desires are necessary to prepare you for a peaceful and happy death. Such views and desires Job had. He knew that his Redeemer lived, and would take care of his precious and immortal spirit, after his body had crumbled to the dust, and become food for

worms. Such views and desires David had. He humbly and confidently said to God, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." And such views and desires pious Simeon had, who said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." Such views and desires we have reason to hope she* had, who the last week found her silent and peaceful house of the grave. She had lived a great many years, and gone through a vast variety of checkered scenes of prosperity and adversity. She was weary of life, and desirous of death. She said very lately that she enjoyed clear and happy views of God and divine things. This is a ground of consolation to her christian friends and to her pious relatives; and, at the same time, is a kind and solemn admonition to her children and grand-children, to prepare to follow her, and to meet her in that world of rest where they have reason to hope all tears are wiped from her eyes.

The aged have fallen in thick succession, in the course of a few months past. These instances of mortality speak louder than words, and solemnly admonish those who are bending under the weight of years, and stooping over the grave, to prepare to go the way of all the earth. Though the death of the aged is of little consequence to the world, who are often very willing to spare them, yet death is of the highest importance to them. Their long lives will draw after them the most serious and interesting consequences as long as they exist. The scenes through which they have passed, the instructions they have received, the parts they have acted, the good they have received, and the evils they have endured, will form a source of reflections which will never cease to afford them pleasure or pain to all eternity. Death is not only drawing nearer and nearer every day, but becoming more and more important. Whatever the aged have to do for themselves or others, they have to do immediately; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither they are going.

Though those in the morning and meridian of life may view their lives very important, yet God may view them otherwise; and though they may imagine it is necessary for them to live, God may view it necessary for them to die. And if he does, they must die. But are you ready? If not, you have no time to lose in getting ready. You know not what a day may bring forth. Your parents may die, but you must die. Your contemporaries may be spared, while you are taken. "Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." Plead not the busy season as an excuse for delay.

*The wife of Mr. David Gilmore.

# SERMON XXXII.

## DEPENDENCE ON GOD FOR LIFE.

DECEMBER 31, 1826.

And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified. — Daniel, v. 23.

The prophet Daniel was carried to Babylon early in life, and lived there during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar. He interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, and instructed him in the true knowledge of the true God, which his son Belshazzar must have once known, but did not choose to remember. His father Nebuchadnezzar had publicly professed, in the most explicit and solemn language, his firm belief in the only living and true God. "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those who walk in pride he is able to abase." Though Belshazzar had heard this solemn declaration of his father's faith in the being, perfections and government of the true God, yet he disregarded it, and stupidly bowed down to dumb idols, which could afford him no relief in a day of danger and distress. While he was feasting, and carousing, and worshipping his golden gods, in contempt of his Creator and Preserver, he saw the fingers of a man's hand, writing his fearful doom on the wall of his palace, which filled him with consternation and horror. He called for the astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers, to read and explain the writing; but they could not read it, nor make known to the king the interpretation of it. This enhanced his anxiety and distress. But his queen soon relieved his mind, by advising him to send for Daniel, who had inter-

preted his father's dream. He complied with her advice, and sent for Daniel. When he came, he first reminded the king how the God of heaven had punished and humbled his father for his ambition and gross idolatry, and then reproves him for following his father's sins, and disregarding his awful fate. "And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven, and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." Though Belshazzar was a heathen, yet he ought to have known and realized his absolute dependence upon God, in whom he lived, and moved, and had his being. And hence we may justly conclude, that all men ought to maintain a realizing sense that God is the preserver of their lives. I shall,

I. Show that God is the preserver of their lives; and,

II. That they ought to realize it.

I. I am briefly to consider, that God is the preserver of the lives of men. He is certainly the giver, and of consequence the preserver of life. We cannot conceive that God can give mankind independent life, any more than independent existence. Life is sustained and preserved by secondary causes; and all the secondary causes of the preservation of life are under the entire control of God, who can make them the means of destroying, as well as of preserving life. All the elements, the air, the earth, the water, and the fire, which serve to preserve life, may be and often are employed by God to destroy it. It appears from the whole course of providence, that God constantly carries the lives of all men in his hand. And this truth is plainly and abundantly taught in scripture. God is called "the fountain of life." Job calls him "the preserver of man." David says, he is the preserver of man and beast. Daniel tells Belshazzar, "the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." And Paul declares, that "God that made the world, and all things therein, giveth to all, life, and breath, and all things." The Bible every where confirms the declaration, that "in Him we live, and move, and have our being;" which implies that all mankind are constantly and entirely dependent upon God the giver and preserver of life. The preservation of life amounts to a constant creation, and is the effect of the unremitting power and goodness of God. I now proceed to show,

II. That men ought to maintain a realizing sense of this important truth. For,

1. They are all capable of realizing it. The horse and the mule, the crane and the swallow, and all the animal creation, are dependent upon God for life, and breath, and all things; but these mere animals are entirely destitute of capacity to know that God is their creator and preserver. This exempts them from all obligations to know and realize their entire and constant dependence upon their creator and preserver. But men are made wiser than the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven, and the inspiration of the Almighty has given them understanding, to trace their own existence, and the existence of all created natures up to the first and supreme cause. And though this first and supreme cause is invisible to their bodily eye, yet to the eye of their mind, "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." So that they are without excuse, if they do not realize his being and supremacy, and their own absolute dependence upon him. Indeed, this is so easy, that children very early are capable of being made to know that God is the constant preserver of their lives. Those who have had the least instruction and lived in the greatest stupidity, can very easily realize their dependence upon God for the preservation of life in the hour of danger. The sailor, the soldier, the infidel, will instantaneously cry to God to preserve their lives, when death or imminent danger appears near. Persons of all ages and characters are daily manifesting by their conduct that they are very capable of knowing and realizing their absolute dependence upon God for the preservation of life. And this capacity creates an obligation. If they know God, they ought to treat him as God. This was the duty of Belshazzar, a heathen, and much more the duty of all who live under the full blaze of gospel light.

2. God requires all men to live under an habitual sense of their constant dependence upon him, as the preserver and disposer of life. He has informed them in his word, that he has determined the number of their months and days, and fixed the bounds of life, over which they cannot pass. He has told them, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain it in the day of death." And upon this ground, he has admonished them to live under a practical sense that it depends entirely upon his will every day, whether they shall live or die. "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.

For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will we shall live, and do this, or that." Agreeably to this, we find another solemn admonition against presuming upon the preservation of life. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow: for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." These declarations of God's supremacy and man's dependence lay every one under indispensable obligation to realize that God is the preserver and disposer of life. God requires every one to live and act every day as though it might be his last, for this plain and obvious reason, that it may be his last. Every man therefore ought to begin and end the day with God, or "to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." The word of God concurs with his providence, and calls upon all men to live from day to day, under a realizing sense that their Maker is their preserver.

3. Good men do realize their constant and absolute dependence upon God for the preservation of life. This is the language of some of the best of men whose views and feelings are recorded in the Bible. Job speaks very freely and fully upon this subject. He says unto God, "Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay, and wilt thou bring me into dust again? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life and favor, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." David says, "As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice. He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me. Thy vows are upon me, O God; I will render praises unto thee; for thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living? For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." Ezra and Nehemiah frequently acknowledged the power and goodness of God in the preservation of their lives. Paul used to make his promises under a sense of his dependence upon the preserving power and goodness of God. He promised the Corinthians, "I will come unto you shortly, if the Lord will;" and he desires the prayers of the christians at Rome, that "he may come to them by the will of God." Indeed, all real christians have an habitual sense that God is the preserver of life. This they have been effectually taught, by being in the hand of God, and shaken over death and the pit. They have experienced their own weakness and dependence, and realized

that God could wound or heal, destroy or save, and that none could deliver out of his hand. Unreserved submission to God always flows from a sense of absolute dependence upon him. And while christians feel and act agreeably to their peculiar character, they live and act under a realizing sense that in God they live, and move, and have their being, and that without him they can do nothing. But if this be the genuine feeling of christians, it ought to be the feeling of all mankind; for they are all equally and constantly dependent on God, "in whose hand their breath is, and whose are all their ways." Their stupidity does not destroy their obligation to live as seeing him who is invisible, though it prevents their doing their duty.

4. Men ought to maintain a realizing sense of their constant dependence upon God for the preservation of life, in order to form all their temporal and spiritual designs with wisdom and propriety. If God be the preserver and disposer of life, then he is the disposer of all things which are connected with and dependent on life. If the lives of all men are in the sovereign hand of God, then the world and the things of the world are in the sovereign hand of God; and while men view their own lives and the lives of all other men, and the world in which they all live, as in the hands of God, the world and all things in it appear very different from what they do, when God the preserver and disposer of all is out of sight and out of mind. This is evident from general observation and experience. We see that when those who have been living without God in the world, come to realize that he is the preserver of life and disposer of all things, they feel and speak and act very differently from what they did before. Their views, opinions and conduct are greatly altered. And the reason is obvious. When they realize their own dependence, and the dependence of all men and of all things upon God, it fills their minds with a realizing sense of his universal presence and providence. This cuts off all dependence upon themselves, and upon others, which sinks them and the world into their proper vanity and insignificance. Now, if such be the natural consequence of men's realizing that God is the preserver and disposer of all things, then it is a matter of high importance that they should realize this great and practical truth. They cannot possibly judge, feel and act wisely, until they do realize their own true situation, and the true situation of all men and of all things around them. They must have false views, false hopes, and false fears, so long as they overlook the hand of God in preserving and governing all things. It therefore deeply concerns them to realize a truth which will rectify their mistakes, and naturally lead them to feel and act as dependent creatures. There is no

truth of more practical importance than this. It is necessary to be known and realized and loved, by all persons and at all times, and under all circumstances of prosperity and adversity, and of health, sickness and death.

5. If men would consider how much God does for them to preserve their lives, they could not help feeling their obligation of maintaining an habitual sense of his power and goodness, in their constant preservation. God must do a great deal to preserve the lives of such weak, feeble, careless creatures as mankind are. They are not always willing to preserve one another's lives when they are able, but often disposed to destroy them. God must not only preserve and govern the world in which they live, but all the creatures and objects in it, in order to preserve the life of every individual person. He must continue the regular succession of the various seasons. He must preserve the animal creation, to nourish, feed and clothe the human species, and preserve them from the snares, the arrows and means of death. He must constantly govern the winds and waves, and all the elements. He must watch over every individual person every moment. He must strengthen every nerve, and guide every motion of the body, and all the motions, affections and volitions of the mind. He must guide every step we take, and determine every circumstance of life. What great, and numerous, and astonishing exertions of power, wisdom and goodness does God make, to preserve the feeble lives of men for seventy or eighty years! If any one will only look back upon the days and years he has lived in a world of ten thousand dangers, diseases and casualties, he must be struck with astonishment at God's preserving mercy. How much has he done to preserve the lives of all the old and young who are now in the land of the living! He has carried them in his hand, in his eye, and in his heart, ever since they had a being. God has realized their dependence upon his power and care, if they have not. God has felt their weight, if they have not realized his supporting hand. How reasonable is it that they should awake from their stupidity, and realize his power, patience and love, in preserving such weak, guilty and worthless creatures! And this will appear still more reasonable, if we consider,

6. What peculiar methods God has taken to make mankind continually sensible of his supporting and preserving hand. He has not only preserved their lives, but preserved them in such a manner, and under such circumstances, as are best adapted to make deep and lasting impressions on their minds, of their constant and absolute dependence upon him for life and breath and all things. He has preserved them from run-

ning into innumerable dangers into which they would have run, had it not been for his internal or external restraints. He has preserved them from the same dangers which proved fatal to others. He has raised them from the same mortal sicknesses which proved fatal to others; from the same flames of burning buildings which consumed others; from the same shipwrecks which sunk others in the merciless waves. When sickness has brought them to the side of the grave, and all human hopes of recovery were lost, he has raised them up, and added not only fifteen, but fifty years to their lives. How many have been preserved upon land and upon water, while thousands have fallen and perished on their right and on their left! All these circumstances have been suited to make all the living realize the power and goodness of God in preserving their lives in this dangerous and dying world. David was astonished at the preservation of his own long life, and exclaimed, "I am as a wonder unto many!" Jeremiah was deeply affected with the preserving goodness of God. He cried, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed!" We can hardly conceive that God could use more or better means to impress upon the minds of the living a deep and lasting sense of his preserving mercy, than he has used, and is continually using. And nothing can prevent the living from realizing this, but their stupidity and ingratitude.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If all men ought to realize that God is the preserver and disposer of their lives, we have reason to think that they generally live in the neglect of this important duty. They generally cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God. They do not call upon God in the morning or in the evening, from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, and from year to year, unless something takes place to alarm their fears, and constrain them to realize their dependence upon him in whose hand their breath is, and whose are all their ways. They generally feel and act as though they were entirely independent of their creator and constant preserver. They feel sufficient to preserve their own lives and supply their own wants in time to come, as they imagine they have done, in time past. They manifest this self-dependence, not only by neglecting prayer, but by forming great and complicated designs, which require years and years to accomplish. They lay out to traverse the land and the ocean, and visit distant nations and countries, to gratify curiosity or amass property. They propose to spend one year in one place, two years in another,

ten years in another, and then return to their usual place of residence, without once realizing that it must depend upon the preserving power and goodness of God whether they shall go here or go there, do this or do that. They choose to live without God in the world, and feel and act as though God were not in all their thoughts. There is another way in which they clearly manifest their forgetfulness of God's supremacy and their own dependence. They acknowledge that things temporal are far less important than things eternal; but wholly neglect things eternal at present, and wait for a more uncertain season to obtain things eternal. Thus they boast of to-morrow, though they know not what a day may bring forth. Is this the folly, stupidity and presumption of only a few individuals of mankind? No. It is the folly, stupidity and presumption of the great majority, in every heathen and christian nation on earth. This world is full of rational and immortal creatures, who say in their hearts and by their conduct, there is no God for them to fear, or love, or glorify.

2. Since all men ought to realize that they are constantly and entirely dependent upon God for the preservation of life, they must be inexcusable for pursuing any modes of conduct which they know tend to banish such a realizing sense of the divine presence and preservation from their minds. All men know what modes of acting and living tend to banish God from their thoughts, and to stifle a sense of their obligation to love and glorify him. And they must equally know that whatever practice produces this effect upon their minds is criminal and inexcusable. According to this criterion, it is easy to see the criminality of loving and pursuing the things of the world supremely. Supreme love to the world must necessarily banish supreme love to God from the heart. Though all men ought to be industrious in their various useful and lawful callings, yet they ought to labor in such a manner, and from such motives, as shall not indispose or unfit them for any religious duties. Every man may know whether his employment, or his manner of pursuing it, tends to produce this effect or not. If it does produce this effect, he must know he ought to lay aside his employment, or pursue it in a different and better manner. Every body knows that vain company and vain conversation tend to dissipate the mind and corrupt the heart, and unfit men for the service of God; and of course, that such things ought to be avoided. Every body knows that profane language, intemperance, gambling, frolicking, and festival entertainments, have a stupifying and demoralizing influence upon the minds of all who indulge themselves in such practices. And, therefore, they ought to be universally condemned,

avoided and restrained. No person in the world can justify such practices as have been mentioned, who believes that God ought to be remembered, his preserving goodness ought to be realized, and his name glorified. What was it that banished from the mind of Belshazzar a realizing sense of the preserving goodness of that God whom his father had known, and whom he had known, and in whose hand his breath was, and whose were all his ways? Was it not his vain company, his vain amusements, and abominable festivals? Similar causes will produce similar effects, in every age and in every part of the world. Prodigality, profaneness, intemperance, vain amusements, and worldly-mindedness, will always lead men to forget God, their maker, preserver and benefactor. Therefore every mode of living, thinking, and acting, which leads men to forget and forsake God, ought to be universally condemned and avoided by young as well as old.

3. If men ought to realize that God is their preserver, then they ought to use those means which he has appointed, to keep in their minds a deep and abiding sense of his supremacy and of their dependence. Reading the Bible has a happy tendency to bring and keep God in view. His word clearly exhibits his character, his perfections, and his universal dominion over the lives, the hearts, and the views, designs, and actions of all mankind. It records what he has done in the course of his providence, and what he has designed to do in the government and redemption of the world. It contains his terms of mercy, his promises to the obedient, and his threatenings to the disobedient. It exhibits such truths, and objects, and events, and motives, as are best adapted to make men see and feel that he holds in his sovereign hands their lives, and all their interests for time and eternity. This sacred volume they ought to read every day, that they may keep themselves in the fear of the Lord all the day long. Prayer has a direct and powerful tendency to raise the attention and hearts of men to God, and give them a realizing sense of his supremacy, and their dependence upon him for life, and breath, and all things. It is by this that they draw near to God, and God draws near to them and leads them to live and act as seeing him who is invisible. The keeping of the Sabbath, and the constant attendance on public worship and divine ordinances, naturally tend to inspire the minds of men with a solemn and habitual sense of their dependence upon God to preserve their lives and direct all their steps. These are means by which men can, and without which they cannot, maintain a due sense of the divine presence and preservation. We may justly conclude that those who neglect reading the word of God, and calling upon his name,

and attending public worship and divine institutions, live without God in the world, never obey any of his commands, never submit to any dispensations of his providence, and never perform a single duty. They are practical atheists, let them profess what religious opinions they will. If they are pagans, they are atheists. If they are Jews, they are atheists. If they are christians, they are atheists. If they have named the name of Christ, they are atheists. How many poor, guilty, dependent creatures are there in the heathen world! How many poor, guilty, dependent creatures are there in the christian world! How many poor, guilty, dependent creatures are there in this place! Or, in other words, how many are there who neglect prayer, neglect public worship, neglect divine ordinances, and live and act as though God was not their creator and preserver, and there were no future state of rewards and punishments! What a world do we live in! And whose world is it?

4. If God be the preserver and disposer of the lives of men, how fast must the guilt of those arise and increase, who never glorify him, in whose hand their breath is, and whose are all their ways! Though God raised Nebuchadnezzar to the throne of Babylon, and sunk him below the beasts that perish; and though his son Belshazzar knew all this; yet he forsook the God in whose hand his breath was, and whose were all his ways, and bowed down to the worship of the god of this world, in contempt of the God of heaven, who had made him a rational and immortal creature, and raised him to the head of the greatest kingdom then in the world. This highly provoked the God of heaven, his creator, preserver, and benefactor, who saw him rise in guilt as fast as he rose in power, in wealth, in magnificence, voluptuousness, and profaneness. And though he waited to be gracious to him for years, yet in the night of his highest revelry, he sunk him and his mighty kingdom in perpetual ruin. If Belshazzar, who was a heathen, rose so high and so fast in guilt for not glorifying God, how much faster and higher must those rise in guilt, who do not glorify the God of their fathers, whom they have been taught to glorify from their earliest days! Their guilt has constantly been increasing, as their years, their months, and moments have increased. Their guilt has increased as fast as their knowledge, their wealth, their prosperity, and their opportunities of doing and getting good have increased. How many mercies have they received and abused! How many talents have they buried or perverted! How much have they injured God, their fellow men, and themselves! If impenitent sinners seriously and impartially look into their hearts and lives, they will find

that this is a just description of the great and aggravated guilt they have contracted. It is impossible for those who sit in heathen darkness and ignorance to sin so fast and to rise so high in guilt, as those who sin against the gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light, unfolded the character of God and man, and the glorious and awful realities of the invisible and eternal world. This is the dictate of reason, and is confirmed by the declarations of Christ, concerning Jews and Gentiles. He represented the sins of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, as far less criminal than those of the sinners in Zion who had heard and rejected the glorious gospel of divine grace. It will be much more tolerable in the day of judgment for Belshazzar and the impenitent sinners in Asia and Africa, than for the disbelievers and rejecters of the gospel in Britain and America; and hence,

5. The patience of God towards this atheistical, guilty, and ungrateful world, is astonishingly great. He is constantly displaying before their eyes his power, his wisdom, and his goodness, in preserving their lives, and loading them with the rich blessings of his providence and grace; and yet they overlook the hand and the heart of him, in whose hand is their breath, and whose are all their ways. Though he sees all their stupidity, infidelity, ingratitude, and disobedience, and carries their lives and all their interests in his hand, and could destroy them at any moment, yet he spares the lives of such sinful creatures from day to day, and from year to year. Is this the manner of men? No; far from it. Will one nation exercise patience towards another nation of their enemies, whom they are able to chastise or destroy? Are personal enemies disposed to exercise patience, when they imagine they have power to retaliate? God's patience is infinitely great towards his weak, guilty, dependent, incorrigible enemies. He preserves the lives of millions every year, who deserve every moment to be cut down as cumberers of the ground. His patience is equal to his power and goodness, which infinitely surpass the power and goodness of man; and he claims the honor of it. He says by his prophet Hosea, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man." To such divine patience do millions of the human race owe the preservation of their lives from day to day, and year to year. From this we must conclude,

6. That all impenitent sinners are constantly and imminently

exposed to temporal and eternal ruin. It is of the Lord's mercies that they have not before now been consumed. His patience is not boundless, but limited. It will in a few days or few years come to an end. It does come to an end every day in respect to many, and every year in respect to millions. The year which closes to-day has closed the eyes of millions. The living in every part of the world are monuments of sparing mercy. Though there has been no epidemical or very mortal disease prevailing in this place the current year, yet this year has put an end to twenty-six lives among us. Four very aged persons, five a little past the meridian of life, five young persons, eight children, and four infants. All these instances of mortality call upon us to realize that God is the preserver of our lives, and holds in his hand our breath, and directs all our ways. They call upon the young to remember their creator and preserver in the days of their youth. They call upon the strong and healthy to realize that health and strength cannot save them from death, whenever God sees fit to send it. And they more loudly call upon the aged to set their souls and houses in order, for another year or month may not be added to their lives. Serious questions now occur, Who among the young and the middle-aged are prepared to live and glorify him, in whose hand their breath is, and whose are all their ways? And who in particular are prepared to follow the next year their relatives and friends, that have gone into eternity this year? It would be strange, if some of such mourners should not be called away before the ensuing year closes. But if none of them should be called away so soon, numbers of others most certainly will. Who they are, we know not, and they know not. What then I say unto one, I say unto all: Watch and pray, that ye may be also ready.

# SERMON XXXIII.

## GOOD MEN WAIT FOR THE DAY OF THEIR DEATH.

JANUARY 23, 1820.

If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. — Job, xiv. 14.

Mutability cleaves to all mankind from the cradle to the grave. They change from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age. They change from health to sickness, and from prosperity to adversity. Most of these changes Job had already experienced, and some of them in a very sudden and singular manner. But all these changes he viewed as nothing, in comparison with another great and important change which he continually anticipated. He calls it emphatically "my change;" as though he never did and never should experience any other. "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." Job was a perfect and upright man. He had served God from pure and disinterested motives. He had committed his body as well as his soul into the hands of his Redeemer, whom he expected to see in the morning of the resurrection. He habitually realized the grave as his house, and eternity as his home, and death as the means of bringing about the great and desirable change which he was patiently waiting for. All good men have similar views and feelings respecting their appointed change. They not only realize the certainty and importance of it, but anticipate it with holy hope and confidence, as one of the blessings contained in the covenant of grace. They would not live alway, but would have this earthly tabernacle taken down, that they may be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. This allows us to say with truth and propriety,

That the godly have good reasons to wait for their appointed change of death. I shall show,

I. That death is an appointed change.

II. What is implied in the godly's waiting for their appointed change. And,

III. That they have good reasons to wait for it.

I. I am to show that death is an appointed change. We have no reason to think that such a change as death would have ever happened, if it had not been for the first sin of our first parents. It was in consequence of that first offence that a sentence of mortality was passed upon the whole human race. It was then appointed to all men once to die. This general appointment of death is universally believed by all who believe the gospel. But Job speaks of a more particular appointment. "All the days of my appointed time will I wait." This implies what he had just before said in this chapter of every man's appointed time. His days are determined, the number of his months, and the bounds are fixed over which he cannot pass. There is a difference, some suppose, between such a particular and a general appointment of death. Accordingly we find many who allow that God has appointed death to all men; but deny that he has appointed the time, or place, or means of any particular person's death. This then is the point now to be considered.

Since it is asserted in scripture, and universally allowed, that God has appointed death to all men, we may justly conclude that he has appointed, how many years, how many months, how many days, and even how many moments, every individual of the human race shall live. Job believed that God had determined not only how many years, but how many months, and days he should continue this side of the grave. He says, "all the days of my appointed time will I wait." He viewed the day of death as a very important day to himself. And the day of death is indeed a very important day to every one of our dying race, whether he does, or does not, realize its vast importance. It is certain, however, that God knew from eternity how important death would be to every one of mankind, and can we suppose that he would leave such a serious and interesting event to mere chance or accident? Besides, it seems difficult to conceive how it was possible for God to appoint death to every individual, without appointing the time, the place, and the means of his death. If any one of these circumstances was left unappointed, the death of any individual might never take place. Supposing the time, and place, and means of Christ's death had not been appointed, could God, or Christ, or any being in the universe, have known beforehand that he

would have died on the cross? This holds true of every living man. If the days of his life, and the time and circumstances of his death, were not appointed, it could not be known beforehand that he would ever die. But we find that God has been able to foretel the death of individuals. He foretold the time, the circumstances, and the instruments of Christ's death. He foretold the death of the king of Assyria, by the hands of Hazael. He foretold the death of Ahab at Ramoth-Gilead. He foretold the death of Hananiah the prophet, who had taught rebellion in Israel. And there is no doubt but that he could foretel the death of every person in the world. He perfectly knows when, and where, and by what means, every person will come to his last end. And he knows this, because he has appointed every death, and every circumstance attending it. It is as plain from scripture that the time and means of every death is appointed, as that the great change itself is appointed. Every person will live all the days of his appointed time, and no longer. God has appointed the bounds which he cannot pass. And he has revealed this appointment for the instruction and admonition of the living, while he has concealed the time and circumstances of their dying hour. They know, therefore, that they ought to stand in the posture of servants watching and waiting for the coming of their Lord.

I proceed to show,

II. What is implied in the godly's waiting for their appointed change. None but those who love and serve God sincerely, like Job, do properly wait for the day of their decease. The wicked, instead of desiring and waiting for death, dread its approach. It is one of the rare and distinguishing traits in the character of the godly that they wait for their appointed change; which implies,

1. The habitual expectation of their dying hour. We never wait for a person whom we do not expect will come, nor for an event that we do not expect will exist. Waiting always carries the idea of expectation. And when the godly properly wait for death, they really expect it will come at the appointed time. It is likely Job in his afflictions and bereavements had a lively sense of his own mortality, and really expected the time of his living was short, and the day of his death was very near. Nor had he only such an occasional and transient sense of his dying condition; but he habitually maintained a lively apprehension of the certainty and growing nearness of death. David as well as Joshua said, "I am this day going the way of all the earth." And the eminent saints before them confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and ardently desired a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker

is God. Paul declared, "I die daily." Good old Barzillai lived in continual expectation of his dying day, and would not suffer himself to be in a situation to divert his attention from it. It is true, good men do not, and ought not, to think of nothing else but dying, or to expect that every moment will be their last. But they ought and do live in the habitual expectation of death, and realize that it may come at a day or hour that they had not anticipated. And this is one thing necessarily implied in waiting for their appointed change.

2. This also implies an habitual contemplation, as well as expectation of death. It is one thing to expect death, and another to contemplate upon it. When a person is waiting for any event, he naturally revolves it in his mind, and contemplates it in various points of view. So good men, who are really waiting for death, keep it much in mind, and contemplate upon the antecedents, concomitants, and consequences of exchanging worlds. Like Paul, they die daily, and seriously revolve in their minds whatever can be considered as naturally connected with it. They frequently place themselves in a dying situation, and anticipate as far as possible what must be their views and feelings whenever they shall be seized with a mortal disease, laid upon a bed of pain and languishment, surrounded by their friends and acquaintance, expecting every moment to close their eyes upon all things here below, and go immediately into the presence of God and the untried scenes of eternity. While good men are waiting for death, they have time, and a strong disposition to contemplate, in such a manner, upon their appointed and expected change. They not only place themselves by the side of the grave, but carry their thoughts into eternity, whither they are going, and from whence they shall never return. They endeavor to make the circumstances and consequences of death familiar to their minds, that so when it comes they may meet it with calmness and composure. They often reflect how this world will appear, and how eternity will appear, when they shall actually make the transition out of the one into the other. Some such serious and affecting contemplations upon death are always implied in waiting for it.

3. Good men's waiting for death farther implies that they view themselves prepared for their great and last change. Men never properly wait for any event, unless they think they are prepared to meet it, in all its consequences. So good men do not wait for death unless they are inwardly persuaded that they are prepared to exchange this for a better world. They may indeed be really prepared for the state of the blessed, while they fear they are unprepared. But while their fears outweigh

their hopes, they do not wait for death. There are undoubtedly some good men who are never confident that they are prepared for their appointed change, but are all their life time subject to bondage, through fear of death. Such persons are not waiting for, they are dreading, the coming of their Lord. But Job was not one of such feeble, fearing, doubting saints. He knew to his own satisfaction that his Redeemer lived, and that he should see him at the latter day in glory. He had loved God so sincerely, devoted himself to him so entirely, and submitted to him so unreservedly, that he entertained no doubt that he was prepared for the inheritance of the saints in light. Hence he habitually waited for the time of his departure out of this world, and for his entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Such a good hope through grace is always implied in waiting for the day of death. While David was waiting for the day of his decease, he could appeal to God and say, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness." Those who habitually wait for their appointed change, live in the habitual belief and hope that they are friends to God and God is a friend to them; that he will never leave nor forsake them, but will safely conduct them to and through death, to the kingdom of glory. It is only in this way that even good men wait for their appointed change. I must add,

4. That their waiting for death implies that they desire the time may come for them to leave the world. We wait for what we desire, not for what we dread; and for what we hope, not for what we fear. Those who fear and dread death, cannot be said to be waiting for it in the sense of Job. He waited all the days of his appointed time, as the weary laborer waits for the setting sun, or as a man waits for his coming friend. He said of life, "I loathe it; I would not live alway." He said, "as the servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as the hireling looketh for the reward of his work," so he waited for the close and reward of life. Good old Simeon waited for his appointed change, and his waiting carried in it a desire for its approach. He said to God, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." And he represented christians in general as having the same desire to leave the world. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Christ knew the time of his departure out of the world, and really desired that it might soon come, though he clearly foresaw all the pains and agonies of his cruel death.

Just so his true followers desire the time of their departure to draw near, though they know that death itself is a natural evil, and may be attended with many painful and distressing circumstances. These, simply considered, they do not desire; but all things considered, they are willing, and even desirous, to leave the present for a future state, and patiently and joyfully wait for death.

It now remains to show,

III. That they have good reasons for thus waiting all the days of their appointed time, till their change come. Here I would observe,

1. That they have good reason to wait for their appointed change, because it will put them into a state of perfect holiness. While they are passing through the changes of this world, they carry about with them a burden of sin and guilt. They fall far short of that constant exercise of holy love, joy, and gratitude, and submission, which the divine law demands, and which, at times, they ardently desire to feel and express. Paul was ready to sink under the remainder of his moral corruptions. He cried out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" All who have been made the subjects of a saving change from sin to holiness, love holiness and hate sin, and sincerely desire to be delivered from the power and dominion of it. They make it their business to grow in grace, and become more and more conformed to the moral image of God. They have, therefore, good reason to wait for and desire that great change, which will put a final period to all their moral imperfection, and fix them in a state of perfect, uninterrupted, and perpetual holiness. They verily believe, that the moment they pass through the change of death, they shall cease to sin, and become perfectly holy as God is holy, and shall continue in that holy state for ever. This faith and hope are built upon the immutable promises of God, which afford a solid foundation for their joyfully waiting for the day of their redemption from all sin.

2. Good men have good reason to hope and wait for their appointed change, because it will put them into a state of perfect knowledge as well as holiness. Here they are extremely ignorant, and but babes in knowledge. They know but little about God, about Christ, about heaven, and indeed but little about this world in which they live. The divine dispensations towards themselves and the rest of mankind, are involved in impenetrable clouds and darkness. Job was perplexed with darkness. David was perplexed with darkness, and ready to call in question the divine goodness to him, and to Israel. All good men feel and lament their spiritual ignorance, and ardently

desire to obtain greater light respecting the word and providence of God, and the future and invisible scenes of the invisible world. It is called the world of light, and all who are admitted into it will be immediately and astonishingly enlightened. They will receive more clear, perfect, and extensive knowledge in one day, than they ever received through the whole course of life. Christ has assured them, that what they know not now, they shall know hereafter. And how desirable must it be to those who have been seeking divine knowledge in this world, to be put into a state of perfect light, where their views shall be enlarged, their desires of knowledge gratified, and their access to every source of information unrestricted. They cannot anticipate and realize such a great and desirable change, without hoping and wishing for its arrival. This the apostle Paul and his fellow christians joyfully anticipated and realized. "We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known." Moses said to God, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." This is the sincere desire of every one who has a spiritual discerning of spiritual things; and especially of those who are waiting for admission into the world of light. And they have reason to wait for this happy event, since it will immediately open to their view the brightest displays of the divine glory, and enable them to see God and divine objects in a new and most delightful manner. Their views will no longer be limited and obscured by their gross bodies, but every obstruction to the clearest and fullest discovery of the divine perfections will be removed. And for this reason they desire to be unclothed, and hope and wait for their appointed change.

3. They have good reason to wait for their appointed change, because it will put them into a state of perfect and perpetual rest. This is a world of labor and toil, which no man can escape, in any situation or employment of life. Painful labor is the painful consequence of the first apostacy of mankind. They are all doomed to bear the heat and burden of the day. Good men, who are not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, have a large portion of mental and corporeal labor. Even Christ, while he tabernacled in flesh, was faint and weary, and found his bodily strength weakened and exhausted. As the laborious servant, therefore, hopes and desires and waits for the close of the day, so good men have

reason to hope and desire and wait for the close of life, when they shall rest from their labors, and their works shall follow them. All their labors, and trials, and sorrows will prepare them, in a peculiar manner, to prize and enjoy eternal rest. Moreover,

4. They have another reason to hope and wait for their appointed change, because it will not only free them from all evil, but put them into the possession of all good. Their holiness, knowledge and rest will open to them every source of enjoyment, and allow them to drink as freely as they please of the waters of life. This, God has given them ground to expect after death, and therefore they have reason to hope and wait for the day that shall bring them to the fountain of felicity. David lived in the joyful expectation of the blessedness he should enjoy beyond the grave. "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." Such plain and weighty reasons and motives have good men for hoping and waiting for their appointed change, which shall release them from all the evils and burdens of life, and put them into the possession of all the good they can possibly desire and enjoy.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If good men have so many good reasons as we have seen, to hope and wait for their appointed change, then it must argue great imperfection in christians at this day, not to hope and wait for the day of their decease. If we may judge by appearance, there is ground to fear that some real subjects of grace do not live in a waiting posture for the day of their departure out of time into eternity. Christians have greater reasons and motives than Job, or any of the saints of old had, to wait for their appointed change. They lived under a dark and obscure dispensation, which discovered but little of the scenes beyond the grave; but christians live under a brighter dispensation, which has brought life and immortality to light, and more clearly and fully disclosed the glory and blessedness of the heavenly world. It must argue something extremely wrong in the hearts of those who live under the clear and glorious light of the gospel, not to live in the habit of waiting and hoping for the coming of their Lord, to receive them to himself, that where he is, they may be also. It argues a want

of faith in the great and precious promises of God. It argues an undue attachment to the world and the things of the world. It argues the inconstancy and deficiency of supreme love to God. These unholy affections must be extremely strong to counteract the great and good reasons which christians have, to hope and wait for their appointed change, which will put them into the immediate possession of their heavenly inheritance. It is not so strange nor so criminal for the men of the world to love the world and pursue the world, as for those whom God has chosen out of the world, and set apart for himself, and entitled to all the blessings of his kingdom, to live unmindful of it, unthankful for it, and unwilling to take possession of it. It is extremely unbecoming and criminal for real christians to set their affections on things below, and not on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, where the spirits of just men are made perfect, and where all good is for ever to be enjoyed. But do saints at this day appear so heavenly minded, as saints of old? Do they appear generally to be desiring and waiting for permission to retire from the stage of life? Do they not generally manifest a too strong attachment to the present life, and too little desire for the life to come? Can they reconcile such feelings and conduct with the profession they have made, with the obligations they are under, and with the reasons they have to die daily, and to live in the lively hope of the holiness and happiness which they expect to enjoy beyond the grave? It highly becomes them and concerns them, to walk worthy of their high calling, and of the glorious prospects opened before them in the gospel.

2. If good men have such good reasons to hope and wait for their appointed change, then it is of great importance to make their calling and election sure, because without this, they cannot properly wait for the day of death. The scripture every where teaches the doctrine of saints' assurance as well as perseverance. The Old Testament saints speak the language of assurance, and never manifest any doubts of their good estate. Job expressly declared, "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth." The worthies mentioned in the eleventh of Hebrews, verbally and practically declared their undoubting assurance of a future and blessed immortality in the presence and favor of God. And the apostle Paul maintained the hope and assurance of eternal life to his dying day, which gave him joy and triumph in the nearest view of eternity. "I am now ready to be offered," says he, "and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give

me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." The apostle Peter likewise represents christians in general as obtaining and maintaining assurance of their good estate, and, for the same purpose, of enjoying a peaceful and happy transition out of this world, into the kingdom of glory. "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Here the apostle not only exhorts christians to give diligence to make their calling and election sure, but to persevere in the exercise of those gracious affections which will afford assurance, and secure a joyful entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Since assurance is attainable in the way the apostle points out, it is of importance that christians should attain it, to prepare themselves for living as well as for dying. For so long as they live in doubts and fears respecting their spiritual state, they cannot comfortably wait for their appointed change. They must be continually subject to bondage through fear of death; and dread, rather than wait for that event which they ought, for their own peace, and the honor of religion, to meet with joy and hope.

3. If good men, for good reasons, do wait in the manner that has been described, for the day of their decease, then they derive a happiness from their religion, to which sinners are strangers. Here is a dividing line which sinners cannot pass over. They can pass over many other things in the conduct and character of christians, and stand side by side with them, with great confidence and self-approbation. If christians are industrious and laborious in their callings, so are they. If christians are honest in their dealings, so are they. If christians are faithful to their trusts, so are they. If christians are beneficent to others, so are they. If christians avoid profaneness, levity, and every appearance of external evil, so do

they. If christians maintain family prayer, attend public worship, and hear the word of God with seriousness and attention, so do they. But if christians do really desire and wait for their appointed change, here they fail, and shrink from the comparison. They are conscious to themselves, that they have not lived in the habitual expectation of death; that they have not lived in the habitual contemplation of it, but have endeavored to banish it from their minds; and that they never have desired to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, in order to enjoy that holiness, that knowledge, and that rest which remaineth for the people of God. In a word, they are conscious to themselves, that they never have been willing to leave this world, and go to any other. Here they are constrained to acknowledge the reality and importance of vital piety, which prepares men to live comfortably, die victoriously, and enjoy everlasting blessedness in the world to come. Here they are constrained to feel, if not to say, "The righteous are the excellent of the earth." Here they feel their inferiority, and are conscious, notwithstanding all their worldly attainments and enjoyments, that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. They are totally destitute of and strangers to that permanent source of happiness which those enjoy who live by faith in the great and precious promises of God. Their path is growing darker and darker, while the path of the just is shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," either in life, or in death; "for the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

4. If good men have good reasons to hope and wait for their appointed change, then, if they do not properly and habitually wait and hope for it, they have reason to expect that they shall die in darkness and distress. It may be one of the criminal imperfections of real christians to be so much attached to the world, and so much absorbed in its cares and concerns, as to forget that the grave is their house, and that they are constantly and rapidly hastening to their long home. Many, like Martha, are careful and troubled about many things which are unworthy of their supreme regard, and inattentive to the one thing needful. Though they believe that they shall die, yet they do not set their hearts nor their houses in order, in a practical preparation for their dying hour. As their forgetfulness of death, judgment and eternity is highly displeasing to God, so he may justly leave and forsake them, when their appointed change comes. And there is reason to think that God often

does deny his gracious presence and the light of his countenance to those christians who have lived too unmindful and unprepared for their great and last change. It is a just remark, founded upon general observation, that good men as well as bad commonly die very much as they lived. If they have lived in stupidity, they die in stupidity. If they have lived in darkness, they die in darkness. If they have lived in hope, they die in hope. If they have waited for death, they die in peace and joy. If real christians, therefore, neglect to keep their hearts with all diligence, and to consider seriously and habitually their latter end, they may expect to meet the king of terrors with dismay, and have their sun go down in a cloud.

5. If good men alone have good reasons to hope and wait for death, then it concerns one person as well as another to become good. It is appointed to all men once to die, and there is no discharge in that war. All must sooner or later leave this world and go into another, where their state will be irreversibly fixed during the interminable ages of eternity; and nothing can prepare them for their future and final condition, but repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It will be as fatal to the rich as to the poor, to the high as to the low, to live and die in impenitence and unbelief. Every person has every thing to gain by godliness, and every thing to lose by ungodliness. Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. But ungodliness exposes every one to temporal and eternal ruin. What then shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Hear divine wisdom describe the folly, the guilt and despair of the ungodly in their dying moments: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

6. If good men have good reasons to hope and wait for death, then they are prepared to bury themselves, or their christian friends. They are prepared to go first or to follow after. If their lives are preserved, they are prepared to wait their appointed time, and then go to their pious friends in the world of glory. And the thought of their soon meeting them in that blessed state, serves to reconcile them to their short separation.

May not the aged and lately bereaved widow derive consolation from the hope and expectation of soon following her dear departed husband? It certainly becomes her to wait patiently and submissively for her own appointed time, which cannot be far distant. The death of good men is certainly a source of sorrow, whether they are called away in an earlier or later period of life; and their departure out of the world is a loss to the world. The death of Capt. DEAN, though in a very advanced age, is a loss to others as well as to his friends. He early made a public profession of religion, and externally performed the various duties of it in his family, and in the house of God, where he uniformly appeared an attentive, serious and intelligent hearer of the gospel, which we have reason to think had a happy influence to form him for usefulness in his day and generation. He filled every relation and station of life with dignity, and secured the esteem and respect of every society in which he resided, and of every circle in which he moved. He was a warm, staunch and bold friend to his country in the most trying times. He professed and maintained sound principles in religion, morality and government. He was, in a word, a very useful and respectable citizen, whose decease, even in the latest stage of life, his friends and acquaintance have reason to lament; for he sustained the infirmities of age and the reverses of fortune with uncommon vigor, activity, fortitude and magnanimity. But they ought not to mourn as those who have no hope. It must be a consolation to all his pious friends, who are waiting and hoping for their appointed time to follow him where they hope he has found eternal rest. Nor can it be long before all his brothers and sisters, relatives and friends must follow him into eternity. His death loudly admonishes them to stand in the happy posture of waiting for the coming of their Lord. And what it says to one, it says to all: "Be ye also ready."

# SERMON XXXIV.

## THE LIVING GO TO THE DEAD.

APRIL, 1824.

I SHALL go to him, but he shall not return to me. — 2 SAMUEL, xii. 23.

WHILE David's child was sick, he put on sackcloth, lay in the dust, fasted, and besought the Lord to spare his life. But as soon as he perceived the child was dead, he arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. This sudden change in his appearance and conduct was surprising to his servants, who expected that the death of his child would increase rather than abate the anguish of his heart. They accordingly said unto him, "What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child while it was alive; but when the child was dead thou didst arise and eat bread. And he said, while the child was yet alive I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Such a reflection as this ought to strike the minds of the living, whenever they see any of their relatives, friends or acquaintance called out of this into another world. We are much more apt to realize that our departed friends will not return to this world, than that we shall follow them into another. The truth, therefore, which lies upon the very face of the text, deserves a very serious consideration:

That the dead will not return to the living, but the living will go to the dead.

The subject naturally divides itself into two branches, which I shall distinctly consider.

I. Let us consider, that the dead will not return to the living.

We know there is often a strong desire in the living, that the dead might return to them in this world. They want to see them and converse with them about both temporal and eternal things. This is more frequently the case when they have lost their friends at a distance, and had no opportunity of making or receiving communications of serious and weighty importance. And there is another more common motive for desiring the deceased to return, which is, to know their final condition. Many who would not wish to go into the eternal world to see their departed friends, would yet be highly gratified to see them once more in this life. And it is very probable, on the other hand, that many or all the deceased would be very glad to return to the living, either to say or do something, that they did not or could not say or do before they left the world. But such mutual desires of the living and of the dead to meet again in this world, will not be indulged, because the dead will not be allowed to revisit the earth, where they finished their course, and performed the last act on the stage of life. "As the cloud is consumed, and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more." God has placed a barrier between this and the other world; but what that barrier is we know not: we only know that it is completely sufficient to prevent all intercourse between the living and the dead. The living have sometimes requested the dead, before they left the world, to break over this barrier and appear to them again; and they have engaged to do it if it should be in their power. But there has been no well authenticated instance of the dead returning from the world of spirits. In this case, as well as in many others, God confirms by his providence what he has declared in his word. He says the dead shall not return, and he does not allow them to return. It is true, in several instances he has raised the dead miraculously, to answer some important purpose. But such instances serve to confirm the general truth, that the dead shall not return to this world again. Why God will not suffer the dead to return, we can only conjecture. It may be, as the apostle Paul suggests, because neither the happy nor the miserable can communicate to the living what they have seen or known among the dead; or it may be because, as Christ intimates, that no communications that either the happy or the miserable could make, would be of any real service to convince

the living. It is certain, however, that for wise and good reasons God has absolutely determined that the dead shall not return to this world after their spirits are absent from their bodies. They have gone to their long home, where they must abide for ever; and where the living can never see them without going to them. And this,

II. They must all sooner or later do.

Immediately after the apostacy of Adam, God told him, and through him every one of his posterity, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This sentence of mortality assures all the living that they must go to the dead. The inspired writers sensibly realized and repeatedly taught this solemn truth. Joshua says, "This day I am going the way of all the earth;" that is, I am going where all mankind have gone and are going. David expresses the thought in the same language. "I go the way of all the earth." Job says, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. His days are determined, the number of his months is with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." As for himself he says to God, "I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." And speaking of one that was dead, he says, "The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, and every one shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him." David says, "Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world: both low and high, rich and poor together. They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him:—that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption." And it is said, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war." It does not depend upon the choice of the living whether they shall die and go to the dead. They are under a natural necessity of dying, either by disease, accident, violence, or the infirmities of old age, which none can escape who escape all other causes of death. And when the dust returns to the dust, the spirit must go to God who gave it. All the art of man can do no more than to retard the stroke of death, it cannot prevent its fatal effect. This has been demonstrated by the experience of nearly six thousand years. During such a long period of time, every mineral, vegetable, and animal substance has been explored to discover means of preserving and prolonging life; and yet human life has been gradually shortening from age to age. The word and providence of God have,

therefore, put it beyond the possibility of doubt, that death must come, and all the living must go to the dead. But here a very serious question arises, which deserves a serious attention: What is it for the living to go to the dead?

Though we cannot say any thing upon this question to gratify curiosity; yet we may say some things which we all ought to know and realize. Here then it may be observed,

1. That for the living to go to the dead implies their passing through the change of death. This is undoubtedly in all cases a very great change, and cannot be known any otherwise than by actual experience. I know it is supposed that some have suffered all the anguish or distress of dying, without being dead. They refer to instances of those who have been recovered from long fainting, swooning, and merely apparent drowning. Though persons who have lain long in a fit, or swoon, or trance, or in a state of drowning, may remember and relate their peculiar views and sensations in such circumstances, yet neither they nor others can certainly determine that they really experienced all the pain or pleasure of dying. The pleasure I say, because it is more than possible for God to give some an easy and pleasant passage out of time into eternity. But so far as our observation extends, it appears that death is generally extremely painful. Hence the "agonies of death" has become a familiar expression to denote the exquisite pains of dying. And it is principally on account of what is supposed to be endured in death, that it is called and feared as the king of terrors. The pains of death are usually correspondent to the causes which produce it. Those whose natures are exhausted by old age, often seem to die in more ease than many others. Those who die with a lingering disorder seem to die in nearly the same manner. Those who die in their early days, by acute diseases, often experience greater distress in dying. And those who fall by casualty, or violence, generally suffer the keenest agonies of death. But though the living may be most affected by the apparent distress of the dying, yet they themselves may endure much more than they appear to endure. So that none can know what it is to pass through the great change of death, until they are actually called to endure it. And this all the living must experience, in order to go to the dead. Death is the only door through which the living can go to departed spirits. By whatever means they are brought to their dying hour, it will be a serious and solemn scene to pass through the dark entry which leads out of time into eternity.

2. For the living to go to the dead, implies their committing their bodies to the dust from which they were taken. Whether their bodies are emaciated or full of vigor and activity when

they leave them, they must see corruption, which is the natural and unavoidable effect of death. As soon as the soul departs from the body, the body tends to dissolution, and must be consumed, whether it be laid in a costly tomb, or be deposited in a common grave, or thrown into the ocean, or lie neglected and unburied on the surface of the earth. The ancient heathens were very solicitous about the body after death. They had a strange notion that departed spirits could have no rest so long as their bodies lay unburied. Though this be a groundless and absurd opinion, yet it must be a serious consideration to the living, that they must go to the dead through the grave, that dark and silent and dreary mansion, appointed for all men. If it be something solemn and revolting to go into a tomb, or a grave-yard, or a field where thousands have been slain and left their bones to whiten in the sun, how much more solemn and striking must be the thought of actually lying in the grave and mouldering into dust, as the dead have done for thousands of years past. How many human bodies have been devoured by monsters in the sea! how many have been devoured by beasts of the desert! and how many have gradually mouldered to dust and mixed with their mother earth! No mark or vestige can be found on the earth, of Adam and Eve, and of their numerous posterity for four or five thousand years past; and were it not for sacred and profane history, we could not have known that they ever existed in this world. And all the living are now constantly following those departed inhabitants of the earth into the land of silence and oblivion. When the living go to the dead, they go to the grave, which will cover them in darkness, and blot out their names from under heaven. They will soon become unknown and forgotten, by those who come after them. Who can tell where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lie? Who can tell where Moses and Aaron lie? Who can tell where the kings of Judah and Israel lie? Or who can tell where the prophets and apostles lie? They are all gone to the dead through the grave, where all the living must follow them. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." All who are now living will soon be gathered to their fathers, and mingle with the great congregation of the dead, "alike unknowing and unknown."

3. For the living to go to the dead implies, that they must follow them not only into the grave, but into eternity. The Bible gives abundant evidence of the existence and activity of the soul after it leaves the body. Our Saviour spoke of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as still living. Moses and Elias appeared with Christ on the mount of transfiguration. We read

of the spirits of just men made perfect. We are exhorted to follow those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Stephen committed his departing spirit into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ promised the penitent malefactor that he should that day be with him in paradise. And Paul desired that he might die, in order to be the sooner with Christ. Nor is it less evident that the souls of the wicked exist after death and go into eternity. We have, therefore, just ground to conclude that all who have already died are gone into eternity, where they are in full exercise of all their rational powers and faculties. It clearly appears then, that when the living go to the dead, they go into the world of spirits, where the immense number of the human race that have lived and died, from the beginning of the world to this day, are now collected together in their appropriate mansions. How many of the living would rather never see the dead, than go where they are now to be seen? But they must all go, whether willing or unwilling, and see a world of spirits, which is unspeakably different from this. What an amazing impression must the world of spirits make upon all, when they enter into that untried and before unknown state! This is a serious part of dying, and far more interesting than merely committing the body to the dust. All that we see of death, this side of eternity, looks like sleep and rest; but those who die, see something infinitely more solemn and interesting. They actually go to the dead, and see them in their new and deeply affecting situation. It is sometimes very striking to see how much a person we were once acquainted with, is altered by age, or by sickness, or by adversity, or even by prosperity; but the alteration in the views, and feelings, and appearance in departed spirits, is undoubtedly far greater than any alteration they ever underwent in this life. It is impossible to form a conception of departed spirits until we go to them, and see them in their eternal state. To go from one material world to another, where all the inhabitants are clothed in the same material bodies that we are, would be a very novel and surprising transition; but to go from a material to a spiritual world, where all the inhabitants are immaterial spirits, must be far more astonishing and affecting. And this great transition all the living must make, when they go to the dead. Besides,

4. The living must go to the dead, not merely to see where they are and what they are, but to dwell with them for ever. Many, perhaps, would be really pleased to have a vision of the invisible world, as Isaiah, Paul and John had, and to be permitted to survey the scenes, and objects, and inhabitants, of a happy and miserable eternity, if they might be permitted to

return, as they were. But the living must go into the invisible world, not as mere spectators of it, but as everlasting inhabitants in it. They must go, never to return to the world they have left. They must remain among departed spirits to all eternity. This is the most solemn and impressive idea of death. It struck the mind of Job with peculiar awe and solemnity. "Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return." Accordingly, men's dying is represented as "their going to their long home." As soon as they reach the world of spirits, they will find a place prepared for them, in which they must remain to interminable ages, whether it be among the happy, or among the miserable. The miserable are, by some means unknown to the living, separated from the blessed. And though all at death will go into the eternal world, yet individuals will go to that part of it which is allotted to them for their final residence. The unholy will go to the unholy, whose abode is in the regions of darkness and despair; and the holy will go and dwell with the spirits of just men made perfect. Every departed soul will immediately know its final destination, the moment it enters the invisible world. It will immediately meet a multitude of spirits like itself, in character and destination, whose smiles or frowns will excite unutterable sensations of hope or fear, of joy or sorrow. When Lazarus died, he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. Departed spirits never get lost in their passage from this to another world, however great the distance. They are probably conveyed by those good or evil spirits who attended them through the scenes and changes of their probationary state. Good men are attended by good angels, and bad men by bad angels. They know by their conductors whither they will be conducted. Who can conceive the strong and strange emotions of their hearts, while traversing unknown regions with their new conductors to the places of their final and eternal residence? But their joyful or painful anticipations will be more than realized, when they actually meet the smiles of heaven, or the frowns of hell, which will continue as long as they exist. Thus going to the dead is going into a blessed or miserable eternity beyond the grave; and it is the prospect of such future and eternal consequences of dying, that renders death, of all events, the most solemn and interesting to the living.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the living must go to the dead, then their separation from one another will not be of long duration. The living are

apt to be deeply affected with the thought that they shall not soon, if ever, see their departed friends again. As they know that the dead will not return to them, they seem to forget that they shall go to the dead, and may very soon see them in another world. When children see their dear parents die, they are ready to imagine that they shall never see them again. When parents see their dear children die, they are ready to imagine that they shall never see them again. A voice was heard in Rama, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Her imagination perverted her reason, and led her to despair of her ever seeing her deceased children, either because she thought that they had ceased to exist, or because she forgot that she must soon follow them into eternity. And there is no doubt that other bereaved parents have thought and grieved as Rachel did. Parents and children, the nearest and dearest relatives and friends, can very patiently bear a separation from one another, while they cherish an expectation of soon meeting together again; but when death separates them, they can hardly support it, because it seems like an eternal separation. This is a mere imaginary idea. The time of their separation is short. The living will soon follow their departed friends to that world where they will remain for ever. If the living did but properly realize their own frailty and mortality, they would not imagine that their separation from their deceased friends was either final or lasting, but very short and momentary. The dead, who realize what eternity is, view the longest life as a moment, and expect soon to see those whom they left behind, bewailing a long, if not a lasting separation. The universal and deep mourning of the living for the dead is one of the most striking evidences that their inward thought is, that they shall live for ever, never see corruption, nor follow those who have gone before them into eternity. "All men think all men mortal but themselves."

2. If the living must go to the dead, it cannot be a matter of great importance whether the time be longer or shorter, before they go into the world where their departed friends have gone. They are extremely apt to make great account of the distance of death and eternity. While they vainly imagine that it is a great while before they shall be called to meet death, and go to the dead, they feel little anxiety about leaving the world; but when death and eternity appear near, they are greatly alarmed. It will be as interesting to meet death late, as to meet it early; and indeed the consequences will be much more interesting. Death was far more interesting to Methuselah than to Abel. Methuselah lived eight or nine hundred years

longer in his probationary state than Abel did, and had a much more solemn account to give of himself than Abel had. The truth is, the longer men live in this probationary state, the more serious and interesting will be the consequences of their going to the dead in the eternal world. This seems to be forgotten by those who expect long life, and console themselves that it is a great while before they shall close their eyes upon this world and open them in another. They have no fear of dying, if they may be only spared to the latest hour of life. They are willing to follow their fathers and mothers, their brothers and sisters, and even their own children, to the grave, if they may be permitted to stay behind, and not go before them, nor with them. But if they are young, they may soon follow the young who have gone before them; and if they are old, they must certainly soon follow both the young and the old, who have gone the way of all the earth; and not only see them, but dwell with them for ever. It is one of the most common and fatal delusions, to put far away the evil day of death, which is always near, and may be at the very door. It was this delusion that ruined the unwise man, who laid up goods for many years, and said to his soul, Eat, drink, and be merry. It was this delusion that destroyed Dives, who desired the dead to be raised to warn his living brethren of the same delusion, and prevent their coming to him in his state of torment. And it is this delusion that now keeps thousands thoughtless, prayerless and graceless. As they dread going to the dead, so they dread to think of it, and prepare for it.

3. If those who die go immediately to the dead, then every instance of mortality may be as affecting to the inhabitants of the other world, as to those in this. In this world death is always more or less affecting to the living, in a larger or smaller circle. Solomon represents every instance of mortality as affecting to the living. He says, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." Death has always been the greatest source of sorrow to all the inhabitants of this world. Many who deem it a mark of weakness to shed tears on any other occasion, think it not beneath them to weep with them that weep, and mourn with them that mourn, on account of the decease of their friends or fellow men. The reign of death from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to this day, has made this world a vale of tears, and a scene of bitter lamentation and sorrow. But the living have seen death only on one side, and that which is the least solemn and interesting. They have seen only the sickness, the pains, and the terrors of the dying; but have never seen

the eternal consequences of death in the invisible world. These must be unspeakably more affecting to every benevolent heart in heaven, and to every selfish heart in hell, than any of the previous or attendant circumstances of death in this world. If the conversion of a soul fills all heaven with joy, there is reason to think that the arrival of that soul in paradise spreads a greater and more general joy among the blessed who had been waiting for the happy event. While those who are left, lament, those who meet, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The spirits in prison are not less, though differently, affected by the arrival of a poor, miserable, guilty, malignant spirit among them. Like Dives, they dread the increase of their numbers, which adds poignancy to their torments. The prophet forewarned the king of Babylon, that "hell from beneath should be moved at his coming." As there is not a day nor an hour passing, without deeply affecting the hearts of some in this world by the death of others, so there is not a day nor an hour passing, without deeply affecting by the same event the hearts of some in the world of spirits, who are never stupid, or torpid, but always awake and alive to every thing of serious and eternal importance.

4. If the living will go to the dead in the manner that has been described, then we may see one reason why good men have often been willing to die. Job said, "I would not live alway; all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." Good old Simeon said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." Paul said in the name of christians, "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." The truth of such declarations was often verified by the peaceful and joyful deaths of the ancient patriarchs. It is not incredible that good men should be willing to die, since there is one good reason for it, and that is, their desire to go to the dead, to see them, to converse with them, and to dwell with them for ever. They have a sincere desire to see the first parents of our race, the patriarchs, prophets, primitive christians, their former pious relatives, friends and acquaintance, with whom they once took sweet counsel, and walked to the house of God in company; and above all, they ardently desire to see the Lord Jesus Christ enthroned in glory at his Father's right hand. They live in hope that death will not only put a final period to all their present trials, troubles and sorrows, but introduce them into the presence of such amiable and glorious personages. Though they sometimes tremble at the thoughts of death, yet their hopes often overcome their fears, and make them willing to pass through the dark valley

which leads to the world of light. They live in the habitual exercise of that faith, "which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." They see, by the eye of faith, something beyond the grave worth dying for. They anticipate the blessedness of being where Christ is, where the spirits of just men made perfect are, and where all holy beings are perfectly united in love, communion, and felicity. If good men have such views, desires and hopes, it is reasonable to believe that they may be willing to die. A cordial and firm belief of the gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light, will account for the peace that christians enjoy, and the hopes they entertain, and the willingness they sometimes express, of being absent from the body and present with the Lord. What if some do not believe this to be true, shall their unbelief make it false? Paul actually took his leave of the world with joy, and triumphed in the full view of eternity. He cries, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." How many since Paul's day have expressed similar views and hopes, and appeared entirely willing to die, and go to the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven.

5. If the living must go to the dead, then we may learn one reason why mankind in general are so loath to die. It is not always owing to men's reluctance to leaving this world, but their dread of going into another. They do not wish to meet either saints or sinners in the world of spirits. They know that they can find no pleasure in seeing and conversing with the saints in light, and can find nothing but pain, guilt and despair, in seeing and conversing with the spirits in prison. They can see nothing beyond the grave but what they hate and dread, and this makes them so reluctant to die. They would be willing to leave a world in which they have experienced nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit, but they cannot bear the thought of going into a world where they cannot see a gleam of light or joy, but a state of everlasting darkness and despair. And there are others who dread dying, not merely because they fear the pains of death, but because they fear the awful consequences of going into an unseen and untried world, from whence they shall never return. They wish to avoid seeing saints in all their glory and blessedness, and are still more anxious to avoid seeing those who are receiving the due reward of their deeds, where there is no light, nor peace,

nor hope. I know some say they are only afraid of dying, but not of being dead; but this is probably owing to their not looking through the grave into a boundless eternity. There are, I believe, but very few who are willing to go into another world, that are not willing to go through the pains of death to get there. That faith which reconciles men to go to the dead, generally reconciles them to go through the dark, dreary, or painful valley of death. So that the real cause of men's being so unwilling to die, is the fear of what they may see, or hear, or suffer after the pains of death are over, and they are fixed in eternity. And all who are in a state of unrenewed nature, and under the dominion of a totally corrupt heart, have solid reasons to fear going to the dead, and meeting the inhabitants of heaven or hell. The day of death must be a tremendous day to all who are unprepared for heaven. To be driven away in their wickedness is to be banished from the gracious presence of God, from the smiles, approbation and society of the blessed, and to be doomed to dwell and suffer with the guiltiest, vilest, and most miserable creatures in the universe; and can their hearts endure, or their hands be strong, in the day that God shall thus deal with them?

6. If the living must go to the dead, then a realizing sense of this solemn truth would have a happy tendency to qualify the grief of mourners, and turn their thoughts into a proper channel. They are extremely apt to ponder upon the mere idea of separation, of a long, if not final separation. It is true, their departed friends have left them, and gone to their long home. It is true that they will never return, and you will never have another opportunity to see them, to converse with them, or to enjoy their company, or assistance, or protection, or consoling sympathy. But why should you cherish and increase your sorrows by dwelling upon the imaginary idea of a long separation? The separation will not be long, if you are prepared for heaven, and they are gone there, for you will soon go there and see them, and converse with them, and dwell with them for ever. And all the pains of a short separation will be infinitely outweighed by a joyful meeting, and an everlasting residence together in the kingdom of glory. But if you are not prepared for heaven, and they are not gone there, it is a mercy that you are separated from them, and it will be an infinitely greater mercy if you should be for ever separated from them. Why then, I repeat the question, should mourners nourish their grief by pondering upon the idea of a long separation? They ought to turn their chief attention to what they now are, and what their departed friends now are. These are subjects of the greatest solemnity and importance. And

while these occupy their thoughts, the mere idea of separation will dwindle into insignificance. Their tears will cease to roll, but their hearts will not cease to feel. To think of following them into the grave will produce tenderness and tears; but to think of following them into eternity will produce self-reflection, self-examination, and probably self-condemnation. These exercises have a tendency to do mourners spiritual good, and to prepare them for a happy meeting with their departed friends, or for a happy and eternal separation from them. It is affecting to look into the grave, but it is far more solemn and useful to look into eternity, where all departed spirits are gone, and will for ever remain. The contemplation upon the scenes and objects of eternity is of all things the best suited to afford consolation to mourners, if they ought to receive consolation; and if that does not afford them consolation, nothing else in the universe can, in their present situation. The recent mourners, and there are a number of such, are entreated to attend to the source of consolation which this solemn subject suggests. And if they are not prepared, they are entreated to prepare, to contemplate eternity with joy and hope. This will dry up their tears, and give them that peace and consolation which neither the death of others nor their own death can destroy.

Finally, it is the immediate and indispensable duty of every person of every character, age and condition, to prepare to go to those who have gone from them and will never return. All must go to meet their departed friends, and they must go where they are. Though their bodies are in their graves, yet their spirits are not there, but in eternity, and there they must go to find them, and when they have found them they must abide with them. When the living visit their deceased friends, they must pay them a long, an endless visit, which will be unspeakably delightful or dreadful. But every one must go to the dead, whether willing or unwilling to go. Living parents must go to their deceased children; living children must go to their deceased parents; living brothers and sisters must go to their deceased brothers and sisters; and living friends must go to their deceased friends. All must go; none can be excused; and none know how soon they must leave the living and go to the dead. The grave is without any order. The time of their departure out of this into the eternal world cannot be long to any. It is certainly near at hand to the aged. There is but a step between them and death. And though the young may live many years and rejoice in them all, yet the day of darkness and death will soon arrive, when they too must go the way that all the world have hitherto gone. But Providence is every day telling us that children and youth, and those in the midst of

their days, may meet a premature death. No one knows what a day may bring forth to himself. "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? it is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall live, and do this or that." The serious question now is, are you who mourn, and you who rejoice, prepared to go to the dead? Are you prepared to go to those who have left you, whether they were prepared to leave you or not? Are you prepared to see them, whether they are holy or unholy, happy or unhappy? If you are cordially reconciled to God, and have secured his favor and protection, you are prepared to go into eternity, and to see all that is to be seen, and to know all that is to be known there; but if you are not prepared to meet God, you are not prepared to meet departed spirits, whether they are holy and happy, or unholy and miserable. The question is not whether you are willing to leave this troublesome world; but whether you are willing to meet both the holy and unholy, the happy and the miserable, in another world. This question demands serious self-reflection, and self-examination. The recent instances of mortality, as well as another serious circumstance, imperiously call upon us all to look into our own hearts, and inquire whether we are prepared to go to the dead, who have left us and gone into eternity, from whence they will never return. It would be strange if none of you should this day recollect that I have finished the forty-eighth, and entered upon the forty-ninth year of my ministry among you.* I have buried, perhaps, seven or eight hundred hearers, who are gone into eternity, where I must shortly meet them. It would be strange indeed, if I should not habitually bear in mind the consequences of my preaching, to them and to myself, and in some measure realize that I watch for souls as one that must give account. And under this impression, can you think it strange that I have said so much concerning the eternal happiness to be enjoyed and the eternal misery to be suffered beyond the grave? I expect to meet those of my hearers who are gone before me, and those who shall follow after me into eternity. I wish to make divine truths and divine objects appear to you in this world, as I expect they will appear to you and to me in another world. It becomes me to call myself to an account how I have preached the gospel; and it becomes you to call yourselves to an account how you have heard it.

* April, 1821.

It becomes me to view both you and myself in the light of eternity, and to preach as a dying creature to dying creatures. I shall soon cease to speak, and you will soon cease to hear me; but what I have said and you have heard, will never be erased from our minds. It will be a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death. I am preaching and you are hearing for eternity; and may God, in his infinite mercy, grant that the preacher and hearer may be each other's crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus! Amen.

# SERMON XXXV.

## DEATH IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.

DEATH OF MAJOR ERASTUS EMMONS, MARCH 13, 1820: AGED 33.

I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days. — Psalm cii 24

It is uncertain when David presented this petition to his Creator and Preserver; but it is natural to suppose that it was at a time when he viewed himself apparently exposed to the stroke of death. It seems by what he said just before he made this request, that he was in a low and languishing state of health, and apprehended that he was gradually drawing near to the grave. He felt that his strength was weakened, and therefore expected that his life would be shortened; and, under this impression, he prayed that God would not take him away in the midst of his days. Though he was a good man, and habitually prepared to leave the world, yet he seems to have been reluctant to dying in the meridian of life. And who is there now in the midst of his days, that feels no reluctance to going the way of all the earth? Neither the young, nor the old, whether in a state of nature or of grace, are generally so unwilling to go off the stage of life, as those who are in the midst of their days. If those in the decline of life were to look back and compare their past and present feelings upon this subject, they would undoubtedly find that they never had so strong an attachment to life as when they were in their own view in the midst of their days. Since that period, many things have occurred to wean them from the world. But though mankind are so reluctant to being taken away in the midst of their days, yet this reluctance is no security against the stroke of death, even in that stage of life. David knew that God had a right to cut short his life, and take him away from all his fond hopes,

and expectations, and prospects, in the midst of his days. This right God sometimes exercises; for what Job says is often verified. "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow." It is, therefore, a plain truth, and worthy of our serious consideration,

That God does take away some in the midst of their days, though they are then the most unwilling to die. I shall show,

I. That those who are in the midst of their days are generally the most unwilling to die: and,

II. That nevertheless, God does take away some in the midst of their days, as well as in any other period of life.

I. I am to show, that those who are in the midst of their days are generally the most unwilling to die.

It is not necessary to say, very exactly, who are in the midst of their days. Estimating the period of human life at threescore years and ten, we may consider all those in the meridian of life, whose age is between thirty and fifty years. In these twenty years, mankind are generally the most capable of acting their various parts on the stage of life. And it is in this period that they are generally the most attached to living and the most averse to dying. Generally, I say, because there may be exceptions to this opinion. There are so many changes in the outward and inward state of mankind, that some in the earlier, and some in the later period of life, may be the most unwilling to die. These things being premised, I proceed to observe,

1. That those in the midst of their days have the strongest expectations of living. They have been in deaths oft. They have been sensible of the danger of losing their lives, ever since they can remember; but yet have always escaped the arrow of death. They have often been visibly exposed to accidents; but have always escaped those that are fatal. They have often been sick, and sometimes dangerously so; but have always happily recovered. All these recoveries from sickness, and escapes from danger, have had a natural tendency to create hopes and expectations of living, and still escaping future dangers and diseases. Whether their bodily constitution be slender or robust, they place more dependence upon it in the meridian, than in any other period of life. They have known by experience that they have outlived many who were younger and stronger, and, perhaps, in many respects more likely to live than they. And when they look around them, they find that much the largest class of the living are, like themselves, in the meridian of life. All these circumstances are familiar to them; and they can easily and almost imperceptibly put them together, in order to strengthen and confirm their ardent and

pleasing hopes of living. They are not alarmed, like the aged, at the shortness of life; nor, like the young, at desolating judgments and contagious diseases. No fatal disorders, or accidents, or calamities, which fall upon those around them, destroy, but rather corroborate their hopes of long life. Now this fond hope of living, naturally creates an aversion to dying. Those who have the highest hopes and expectations of living have the greatest reluctance to leaving the world, in which they wish to live. Whatever the hope of the living be founded upon, whether the prospect of getting or of doing good, that hope must render death a dreaded event. And since those in the morning and meridian of life commonly and habitually cherish the most sensible hopes of living, they are, generally, of all persons the most unwilling to bury their earthly prospects in the grave.

2. Those in the midst of their days often wish to do a great deal more good in the world before they die. This was undoubtedly the desire and design of David. As he had defeated the army of the Philistines, and put an end to a dangerous war, while he was but a stripling; so he still desired to serve God and his generation much longer in this world. He was now seated on the throne of Israel, and had an opportunity, if his life was spared, to promote the best interests of a large kingdom. This made him deprecate, like Hezekiah, the cutting off of his life in the midst of his days. Paul was in a strait betwixt two, having a desire both to live and to die. If he had had only a desire to die, he would not have been in any strait betwixt two. But he had a desire to live, as well as to die; and his desire to live arose entirely from his desire to do more good. This desire to do good arises to the highest degree of ardor and vigor in the breasts of good men in the midst of their days, when they have the most clear and extensive view of things, and feel the most capable of promoting the glory of God and the good of mankind. And the desire of doing good creates a desire of living, and a reluctance to dying an early and premature death. Some pious persons in the decline of life express a willingness to die, because they have, in their own apprehension, if not in the view of others, nearly or wholly outlived their usefulness. And when this is the case, it is a good reason why they should be more willing to be dismissed from the cares, the labors, and burdens of life, and have liberty to rest in their graves. While, on the other hand, pious young men are in a measure unconscious of their abilities to do good, when they shall arrive at the meridian of life. They have neither tried their abilities, nor extended their views, nor raised their expectations of doing much good in the world; and

therefore can be more easily reconciled to being taken away while they have hardly begun to be extensively useful. But while the pious and benevolent are in the midst of their days and usefulness, their feelings are different in respect to dying. The prospect of living, and the desire of doing more good to their fellow men, make them more unwilling to be taken away in the midst of their days. Nature and grace unite in giving them a peculiar reluctance to leaving the stage of action, before they have gratified their benevolent feelings.

3. Those in the meridian of life very often wish, not only to do more good, but to get more good in the world before they die. Mankind generally have the most promising prospects of worldly prosperity in the midst of their days. When we read the history of both the good and bad kings of Israel, we find them at the zenith of their earthly glory in the middle of their lives. This was the case of David and Solomon, the morning and evening of whose lives were dark and gloomy. This was the case of Pompey, Cæsar, Cicero, and most of the illustrious Romans. And this is commonly the case of men in all ranks and stations in life. Few arrive to the height of their prosperity, till they have reached the best part of their days. So long as men are rising in wealth, in reputation and power, their prospects are brightening, and their desires of life are increasing; and these prospects often continue until the decline of life, but seldom any longer. It is, therefore, in this fascinating season, that they most sensibly dread the approach of death, which must necessarily lay all their promising hopes and prospects in the dust. Very few experimentally learn the vanity of the world, until it has painfully disappointed them. It is in the midst of their days and at the height of their prosperity, that they are disposed to form the most undue estimate of earthly happiness; and, of course, it is then they feel the greatest reluctance to being deprived of it by the stroke of death. This is one reason why those in the midst of their days are the most unwilling to die.

4. Those in the meridian of life are the most intimately and extensively connected with their fellow men. These connections are the principal source of human happiness in the present life, and render it the most pleasant and agreeable. The circle of friends, relatives and acquaintance commonly expands wider and wider, until mankind arrive at the meridian of life; and then they diminish, till the aged are left almost alone in the midst of a new world of strangers. There is nothing, perhaps, in the present state, which so sensibly endears life, and so strongly draws the affections to it, as the tender ties which unite the hearts and interests of individuals to each

other. These tender ties are often broken one after another before the aged are taken away, which frequently renders death more desirable than life. But the case is far otherwise with those who are in the midst of their days. They are frequently surrounded by rising and numerous families, connected with a large circle of warm and affectionate friends, and deeply interested in the affairs and concerns of life. It is in this period, that the views of men are enlarged, their relative duties are increased, and their public influence widely extended. The cares not only of a family, but of a smaller or larger community, are devolved upon them; and they feel deeply interested in the prosperity of both church and state. These circumstances, which seem more peculiar to those in the midst of life, all conspire to create a reluctance to leaving their friends and connections, whose welfare lies so near their hearts. How often do these considerations cause pious parents, dutiful children, affectionate friends, faithful ministers and useful men, to regret being taken away in the midst of their days, and separated from those whom they hold most dear and valuable in life!

5. Those in the meridian of life are often very unwilling to leave the world, because they have not accomplished the designs they have formed, nor obtained the purposes which they have long pursued. The young form very few important designs, and the aged have nearly accomplished theirs. In the decline of life, men commonly lose their enterprising spirit, and endeavor to draw all their purposes into a narrower compass, and rest satisfied with their present attainments. But those in the prime and vigor of their days, expand their desires like the waves of the sea, and exert all their mental powers to lay new plans, to obtain new objects, and to put forth new exertions to accomplish their wishes. They look a great way forward, and form designs which must take years to carry into effect. Their hearts are bound up in their darling designs and pursuits. They ardently desire to live to accomplish their purposes, which must be entirely defeated if death should arrest them in their course. This Job lamented in the days of his bereavement and distress. He said, "My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart." How many have left their farms uncultivated, their houses unfinished, their merchandise involved, their literary works uncompleted, and their families and friends unprovided for, by being called away in the midst of their days! Death, in such instances, falls upon men in an evil time. And where do we find any in this stage of life, who are not engaged in some worldly design or pursuit; and who would not feel reluctant to leave their designs unaccomplished, and the objects of their pursuit unattained? The

middle-aged are generally too busy to be willing to die, and too much attached to the world to be willing to leave it. Besides,

6. Those in the midst of their days are more unwilling to die than others, because they are more unfit. This is commonly the case, whether they are saints or sinners. When saints are the most involved in the cares and concerns of the world, they are then the most unfit to leave it, and generally feel so. They find that they have not set their souls and houses in order, so as to be practically prepared to leave this, for another world. It is generally in the midst of their days, that good men sensibly and visibly decline in religion. When they are young, they are all awake and alive to divine things; but the cares and love of the world, as they advance towards the meridian of life, very often cool their religious fervor, damp their religious hopes, weaken their religious exertions, and diminish their religious enjoyments. They feel a greater attachment to temporal, and a less attachment to spiritual and divine objects. They are more unfit and more unwilling to die, than they were in their earlier days. And in respect to sinners, they find their worldly views and affections grow stronger and stronger, as they approach nearer to the meridian of life. The careless become careful, the idle become industrious, the industrious become more and more laborious, and the enterprising become more ardent and indefatigable in their worldly pursuits. Their hearts become more and more wedded to the world. We find that the meridian of life is often very different from the beginning and close of it, both in good and bad men. Christians frequently brighten up in the decline of life, who had been cold and lifeless in the days of their vigor and prosperity. And on the other side, those who had been stupid sinners in their early days, sometimes become more serious and disposed to think about death and eternity, in the decline of life. But while saints or sinners are in the midst of their days, and borne forward by the wind and tide of prosperity, they are generally indisposed to think much about death, and still more averse to meeting it. Thus there are many things which serve to make those in the midst of their days more unwilling than others to die. Yet,

II. God does take away some in this period of life. It is true, indeed, he more seldom takes away the middle-aged, than either those who have not reached, or those who have passed the meridian of life. Much the largest portion of the human race die before they have arrived at thirty years of age, and the next largest portion die after they have arrived at fifty. And between these two periods, the smallest number of mankind go off the stage of action and return to dust. This may be owing

to both natural and moral causes. In the meridian of life, as we have observed, the bodily constitution is generally the most firm and robust, and least exposed to fatal accidents and disorders. The moral cause may be, that God has the most occasion for the exertion of mankind, while they are in the vigor of their mental and corporeal powers and faculties. He employs human agents in carrying on most of his providential designs. He has occasion for strong men, bold men, wise men, and enterprising men, to carry into execution his wise and holy purposes. And for this reason, among others, he preserves such men in particular from the stroke of death, until they have done the work which he has for them to do, in the present state of the world. And sometimes their very reluctance to dying may be a motive, with a merciful God, to spare their lives, and allow them a longer space for trial. It seems that David's desire and prayer in the text was heard and answered. So was that of Hezekiah in a similar case. He who regards the young ravens when they cry, may regard the cries of both his friends and enemies, when they plead for sparing mercy. But still, God does take away some, notwithstanding all their desires and prayers for the continuance of life. He has done this in ten thousand instances in times past; and he has not restrained himself from doing it in time to come, by any promise or encouragement he has given to the middle-aged. He has reserved their lives, as well as the lives of others, in his own power. Though they may resolve to go to their farms, or merchandise; though they may lay schemes to do good, or to do evil; yet they know not what shall be on the morrow, for their life, like a vapor, may vanish in a moment, and death disappoint all their purposes, desires, and hopes. God may see good reasons for cutting off their lives in the midst of their days. Their calculating upon life, putting far away the evil day, and crying peace and safety, may be a reason in the divine mind for shortening their days, and blasting their hopes and purposes. God may know that they have determined to live to themselves, instead of living to him and seeking his glory, which ought to be their supreme desire and design of living. But when there is no reason for taking away the middle-aged on their own account, there may be reasons on account of others, who may receive great and lasting benefit from their death in the midst of their days. The death of the middle-aged is uncommonly alarming and instructive; and therefore such may be taken away for the saving good of the living, especially of those in the same stage of life. For these, or some such reasons, God does cut down some of the tall, flourishing and fruitful trees in his garden. God took away lovely Jonathan and pious Josiah

in the midst of their days. And he is still of one mind, and who can turn him? And what his wisdom and goodness dictate, he will do, notwithstanding the hopes, and fears, and prayers, and cries, and efforts, of erring mortals. "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What doest thou?" It becomes both the dying and the living to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If those in the meridian of life are so unwilling to die, then those who have been preserved through that period have peculiar reason to be thankful that they are still among the living. God might have taken us away in the morning or meridian of life. How long have some of us lived, and how many have fallen on our right hand and left, and in the nearest connection with us! We have been in deaths oft, and yet have escaped. God has graciously regarded our former expectations and desires of living, our fears of death, and perhaps our prayers for preservation. In some instances, we have reason to hope that his sparing mercy has been connected with his saving mercy. If not, it may be that he is still waiting to be gracious to us. Others have had as strong desires and expectations of living, and as great a dread of dying, and put up as sincere prayers for sparing mercy, as we ever felt or expressed; and yet God, in his amiable and awful sovereignty, consigned them to an early grave. How thankful should we be for such distinguishing goodness! And how reasonable it is that we should henceforward be willing to die, and wait with patience until our appointed change come! We ought to give up the world before it is taken from us; and, like good old Barzillai, spend the residue of our days in a practical preparation for death. Good old men of old used to die daily, and speak frequently of the time of their departure, which they realized to be at hand. The aged at this day and in this place have the same admonitions of their dying hour, by the decays of nature, and by the late frequent deaths of their contemporaries. The young may die, but we must die. The young have many duties to perform, but one thing and one duty is most needful to us. Let us stand waiting, and watching, and preparing for the coming of our Lord.

2. If those in the meridian of life are so unwilling to die, and so desirous of living, then they have been greatly favored and distinguished. God has taken away more than half of mankind since you were born; many of whom were as unwilling to die, and as desirous of living, as you now are, or ever

have been; and who had as good ground to expect long life as you now have, or ever have had. But God, for wise and holy reasons, has counteracted their desires, defeated their designs, and buried all their promising prospects in the grave; while, in sovereign mercy, he has guarded, guided and prolonged your lives, which you have valued more than all the ten thousand temporal blessings God has ever bestowed upon you. You have never seen the time, perhaps, when you would not have been willing to give up any and every thing you possessed in the world, if it might be the means of preserving your precious lives. This blessing, which comprises all other temporal blessings you have ever enjoyed, God has been pleased to preserve and continue, amidst innumerable dangers, diseases and accidents. You, yourselves being judges, are under the most strong and endearing obligations to give God your hearts and your spared lives. And whether you have or have not given God your hearts and your lives, you have no claim upon him to spare you any longer. God has done enough and more than enough by the way of means, to make you prepared and willing to die. Why then should you not expect to die, as well as the aged? Why then should you not be willing to die, as well as the aged? Distinguishing goodness calls for distinguishing love, gratitude and obedience. If any of you have hitherto withholden that love, gratitude and obedience, which you owe to God for his goodness, you have great reason to fear that he will soon cut you down as barren and unfruitful trees, that cumber the ground.

3. If those in the meridian of life are the most unwilling to die, then they are the most unwilling to hear and obey the voice of God in his word and providence. The same things that conspire to make them the most unwilling to die, make them the most unwilling to hear any thing which reminds them of their frailty and mortality, and of their duty to prepare for leaving this world and going into another. They are in their full strength, and hate to hear of their weakness and frailty. They are attached to the world and to the men and things of the world, and hate to hear of their ever leaving them. They love life, and hate to hear of death. They love time, and hate to hear of eternity. They love their business, their purposes, and promising prospects, and hate to hear of leaving this business unfinished, their designs unaccomplished, and their desirable objects unattained. They are too busy to read, or hear, or speak of future and eternal realities. Their thoughts of the world exclude their thoughts of God. Their love to the world excludes their love to God. The consequence is, that they become habitually stupid and inattentive to the concerns of

their souls, and dread to see, to hear, or to feel any thing which serves to awaken them out of their habitual and sinful stupidity. They know how to guard their eyes, their ears, their hearts and their consciences, against what God says to them, either in his word or providence. In this respect, they differ from those who are younger, and those who are older than they. Children and youth are easily affected by hearing and reading the word of God, and by feeling and seeing the sovereign hand of God in the holy and sovereign dispensations of his providence. Their eyes and ears affect their hearts. But those who are in the midst of their days have learned to bar their minds against every thing that tends to disturb their peace, and lead their thoughts into eternity. So that they can coolly and carelessly see and hear the most solemn truths, and the most alarming providences. They imagine that their mountain stands strong, while the young, the aged and infirm have reason to fear and tremble at the admonitions of God in his word and providence. God complained of the peculiar stupidity of this class of men among his people of old. To every individual of this class he said by the prophet Jeremiah, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear." And Solomon said, "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." Those who are in the midst of their days, and at the height of prosperity, take care not to put themselves into the rank either of the young or of the old. And therefore they consider themselves uninterested, and feel unaffected, by what God says to the aged and the young. They are ready to imagine that they have a peculiar right to disregard what both the young and the aged ought to regard; and to say unto God, "Depart from us;" for we desire not to be disturbed. Whether this be not true, I appeal to your own conduct and consciences to determine; and to draw the solemn conclusion, whether you, of all men, are not the most unprepared to live, to die and go into eternity, and whether you may safely wait for a more convenient season to set your souls and houses in order.

4. If those who are in the midst of their days are the most fond of living, and the most unwilling to die, then we may see one reason why God does actually take away some in that period of life. Though he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; and though he knows that death, in the midst of life, and high hopes and expectations, must be extremely grievous to the dying and the living; yet sometimes he sees fit to send death in such an evil time. He may do this for the benefit or hurt of the dying, or for the benefit or hurt of the living. He knows that the deaths of those in the midst of their days are more alarming, and make a deeper im-

pression upon the human mind, than the deaths of the young, or of the old. He knows how painful and distressing it will be to the dying, to have all their earthly desires and hopes destroyed; and he knows how distressing it will be to the living, to have those taken away on whom they had placed peculiar hopes and dependence. But he may see it best to disappoint all such mutual hopes and expectations, to teach them and others the vanity of the world, the uncertainty of life, and the infinite importance of being habitually and practically ready to go the way of all the earth. Those who die in the midst of their days, and in their full strength and activity, commonly die suddenly and unexpectedly to themselves and others, which is a most alarming circumstance of their death. It speaks to the young and to the old, but especially to those who are in the midst of life, health, strength, activity, prosperity and promising prospects, and bids them to be ready also. They have no excuse for applying the voice of providence, in such instances, to any but themselves. Their views and feelings, and circumstances in life, tell them that they are the very persons to whom God is speaking, and giving a solemn admonition of their frailty and mortality, and of their duty to prepare for their dying hour. He knows how much they need such admonitions, and how difficult it will be to resist the impressions he designs to make upon their minds. Though they may have disregarded the voice of his word, they may regard the voice of his providence, which directly warns them of their danger and duty. And how often have such admonitions of providence proved the means of the saving good of the living!

5. If those in the midst of their days are the most unwilling to die, then those in this stage of life, in this place, are in a very dangerous situation. If we look round upon those who are between thirty and fifty years of age, how few can we find that have made their peace with God, and begun to live to his glory! How few are either habitually or practically prepared to leave the world! How many are entirely absorbed in the cares and concerns of the world, and are too busy to think, to read, to hear, to meditate, or pray! They are standing all the day idle, and refusing to enter into the vineyard of Christ. They neither worship God in secret, nor in private, nor in public. They neither serve God, nor their generation according to the will of God, but serve themselves supremely and entirely; and throw their whole weight and influence to obstruct the cause of God, their own good, and the good of their fellow men. And is it safe to stand, and live, and act in such a manner, while God has need of you, and calls you into his service? Are you willing to live in this manner; are you

willing to die in this manner? What account can you give of your time, your talents, and the religious advantages God has given you? Though your Lord has gone to heaven, he will soon, and perhaps suddenly and unexpectedly, call you to an account. Your feet stand on slippery places; and it is as much as your precious souls are worth, to wait for a more convenient season; it may never come; and if it does not, you are lost for ever.

Finally, this subject, and the late instance of mortality in this place, call aloud upon those in the midst of their days to prepare to follow one of their own age into that vast eternity whither he has gone, and never to return. He lived stupid, thoughtless, and secure in sin, until he was brought to the very sight of death. He was carried away with the vanity of the world, and the pleasing prospects of living, and abused the calls, the mercies, and patience of God, which gave him pain, self-condemnation and remorse. He was constrained to say, "The world, the world has ruined me." He was brought to give up all his vain hopes and expectations from the world, and to feel the duty and importance of choosing the one thing needful. But whether he did ever heartily renounce the world and choose God for his supreme portion, cannot be known in this world. In his own view, he did become reconciled to God, and derived peace and hope from his supposed reconciliation. But it is more than possible, that like others on a sick bed, he built his hopes upon a sandy foundation. Let his case, however, be what it may, he is dead, and called away from his relatives and friends, just as he entered the meridian of life. His death, therefore, speaks with an emphasis to parents, brothers and sisters, and especially to those of his own age, to be wiser and better than he was, and not delay seeking and serving God to a dying hour. It is not I, but my son, who now preaches to you, whose voice once sounded pleasant in your ears. Be pleased, therefore, to hear his voice from the dead; and prepare to follow him to heaven, if he has been permitted to enter there.

# SERMON XXXVI.

## THE WORD OF GOD TAUGHT BY HIS PROVIDENCE.

APRIL 15, 1821.

BLESSED is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law. — PSALM xciv. 12.

THOUGH this world is designed to be a moral school, and is adapted to teach mankind the most necessary knowledge, yet they are naturally dull of apprehension, and averse to receiving divine instruction. But, happy for them, God is able to employ effectual means to lead them to the saving knowledge of the truth. This the Psalmist plainly asserts in the words I have read. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." The spirit of the text may be comprised in this general observation. Those are happy whom God chastises in order to teach them out of his word. I shall,

I. Consider why God chastises men in order to teach them out of his word.

II. Consider how he employs chastisement to teach them out of his word. And,

III. Show that his instruction makes them happy.

I. Let us consider why God chastises men in order to teach them out of his word. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is only if need be, that he ever afflicts or grieves them. If he could as well give them all necessary instruction, without chastising them, he would always do it. But they are all naturally unwilling to be instructed in his word. "They say unto him, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." The general reason, therefore, why he chastises them in order to teach them out of his word, is, because they disregard milder modes of teaching. They

will not receive instruction from his works, which are suited to give them the most important instruction. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." But the Psalmist says in the context, that mankind are too stupid to read the character of their Creator in his works of creation. "Understand ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity." It follows, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." If men would regard the still small voice of God in his works, and read his character therein displayed, they would fly to his word for light and instruction, without needing or feeling his chastising hand. But they will not open their eyes to see him, nor their ears to hear him, until they are constrained to do it by the rod of correction.

Nor will they receive divine instruction from the favors God bestows upon them. He often complains of his people of old, for refusing instruction under the smiles of his providence. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This has been thy manner from thy youth." The goodness of God is full of instruction, but there is nothing in him, which men are more prone to despise and disregard. The blessings which are constantly flowing from his kind and beneficent hand, and which are calculated to affect grateful and benevolent hearts, naturally serve to stupify the unholy and unthankful. They will not regard this mild mode of instruction.

Nor will men generally regard the messages of God, which he sends by the mouth of his servants. Pharaoh would not regard his messages by the hand of Moses. Manasseh would not regard his messages by the hand of his prophets. The Jews would not regard his messages delivered by Christ. And the world would not regard his messages by his inspired apostles. The same spirit has ever since reigned in the hearts of those in prosperity. Their attention and affections are too much fixed on other objects, to regard his word. This is the plain reason why God so often chastises men in order to instruct them in the knowledge of divine truth. When they will not be instructed by gentler methods, he sees it proper and necessary to throw them into darkness and distress, and in that way prepare them to hearken to divine instruction. He

expressly tells us that he takes this method to answer this purpose. He expressly says by Jeremiah concerning his people: "They refuse to know me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts: Behold I will melt them and try them." Again he says by Hosea, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." This, David acknowledges was the effect which divine chastisements had upon the Israelites in the wilderness. "When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God." God chastised Manasseh so severely because he would not be taught by milder means. "And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." Job gives the same reason why God chastises men in order to instruct them. "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction." And again he says of incorrigible kings on the throne, "If they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction, then he showeth them their work, and openeth also their ear to discipline." God generally uses a great many gentle means with mankind before he chastises them with the rod of his wrath. But when all milder means fail of producing the desired effect, then he is under a moral necessity of chastising them for their good. He knows that if the inhabitants of the earth will not be instructed by his works, or by his mercies, they may be brought to learn righteousness by his judgments. I now proceed to consider,

II. How God employs chastisements to teach men out of his word.

The Psalmist plainly intimates that God makes use of afflictions as means of instructing men in the knowledge of divine truth. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." By law here we are to understand not only the moral and ceremonial law, but the scriptures in general, or the whole word of God. The word law, through the whole book of Psalms, is used in this large and comprehensive sense. The law means the statutes, the

testimonies, precepts, judgments and commands of God; and all these mean the same as the word of God, or the sacred scriptures in general. It is in these that the great doctrines and duties of religion are contained, which are necessary to be known, in order to make men wise unto salvation. For God, therefore, to teach men out of his word, is to teach them that knowledge which is spiritual, and connected with eternal life. The question now is, how does God employ trials, afflictions, and every species of chastening, to teach men the saving knowledge of his word? And here I would observe,

1. He employs these means to induce men to read his word. In the day of prosperity, the word of God is greatly neglected. Few feel the importance of reading the Bible, while they are under the smiles of Providence. But when their days are darkened, their earthly hopes are disappointed, and their hearts are filled with sorrow and distress, then they naturally apply to the word of God for comfort, whether they are or are not prepared to receive it. God often chastens persons, to bring them to the long neglected duty of reading his word. He knows that the bereaved and afflicted may easily be made sensible of their need of searching the scriptures; and he has often actually brought them, under his afflictive hand, to ponder his word with deep and fixed attention. David gratefully acknowledges that afflictions had this happy effect upon him. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me; yet thy commandments are my delights." Other good men have found the same salutary effect of afflictions. And when sinners are stripped of their earthly blessings, they are constrained to go to the Bible for support and relief, though they find every page condemns them. God means that their afflictions should drive them to that treasure of wisdom and instruction.

2. God employs afflictions and chastenings to make men hear his word. While men remain undisturbed in their earthly enjoyments, and have no bitter cup of affliction put into their hands, they imagine their mountain stands strong, and they feel as great indifference to hearing as to reading the word of God. But when he stretches out his hand and strikes away the foundation of their worldly hopes and prospects, and wrings their hearts with anguish and distress, they are then no less anxious to hear than to read his word. God makes use of chastisements to give them a teachable spirit, and dispose them to hear the gospel. It is his usual method, when he designs to teach men out of his law, to make them willing to go to

the place he has appointed for their instruction. And he can insensibly lead them there by afflictions, when all other means have failed to bring them to his house. How many have been solicitous to attend the preaching of the gospel, in a day of adversity, who had no inclination to hear it before! When the afflicted have no heart to hear any thing about the world and its vain pursuits and enjoyments, then God opens their ear to hear the gospel, and seals instruction. By means of outward afflictions, he carries them where they may be taught what their peculiar circumstances require them to know, and what, through negligence, they have yet to learn, in order to their present peace and future happiness.

3. God employs his corrections to make men understand, as well as read and hear his word. Many who both read and hear the word of God in a time of prosperity, read and hear it in vain. They do not wish to understand and apply divine truths to themselves, for they feel no occasion for it. But the afflicted often wish to understand, as well as to read and hear the gospel. And it is not uncommon for persons to learn more of God, more of the law of God, more of their own hearts, more of the reality and importance of divine things, and more of the nature and design of the gospel in a few days of sickness, or in a few weeks of adversity, than they had learned in months and years of prosperity. By affliction God turns off their attention from the world, and fixes their attention upon himself. He draws forth their native depravity, and lets them see that they are like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and a wild bull in a net; that they are entirely in his hand; that he can destroy, and none can stay his hand; that there is no door of hope any where but in the gospel; that they must submit to divine sovereignty and embrace the Saviour, or they can never see good and enjoy peace, either in this world or the next. Thus God often employs external afflictions, bereavements and trials, to make the most stout-hearted understand and feel the truth of what he has said of himself and of them in his word. He throws them into a situation, in which they are constrained, by their own views and feelings, to understand what he is, what they are, and what the gospel requires, promises and threatens. He causes them to know what they were most unwilling to know. I may add,

4. He employs the same powerful means to bring the afflicted to love the saving truths of the gospel. When he has led them to read, to hear and to understand his word, he can and often does open their hearts to embrace it. He gives them a spiritual discerning of spiritual things. He has in innumerable instances, by means of afflictions, brought men to renounce the

world and the things of the world, and to take him for their supreme portion. It was in the wilderness that he formed the most pious and holy generation of Israel, who took possession of the land of promise. It is usually the case, in times of general security and stupidity, that he converts individuals by means of his chastenings. He first afflicts, and then teaches them out of his law. He makes them feel the necessity of reading, hearing, understanding and embracing the gospel, and then opens their hearts to embrace it. He causes them to know the rod, and who has appointed it; and the happy fruit is the taking away of their sins. Thus he often afflicts men for the purpose of giving them saving instruction. And when this is his purpose of afflicting, he never fails to accomplish his gracious design.

It now remains to show,

III. The happiness of those whom God effectually teaches the knowledge of his word, by means of the afflictive dispensations of his providence. Every such person is pronounced happy in the text: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." No afflictions in themselves are joyous, but grievous; yet, under divine teachings, they become the occasion of great and lasting happiness. For,

1. The knowledge men are taught through this medium, affords them real comfort and consolation, though their afflictions continue. As soon as they become acquainted with God, as he is revealed in his word, and feel reconciled to his character and government, they rejoice that he reigns, and that they and all his creatures are under his wise and holy disposal. They feel a joyful confidence in the rectitude, wisdom and goodness of all his dispensations. They choose that his will should be done rather than their own; and that his glory should be promoted, rather than their own personal good should be regarded. With such views and feelings Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." David said from his own experience, "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." And the primitive christians said, "As dying, but behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Those whom God teaches out of his law find abundant consolation in the gospel, where he has promised never to leave nor forsake them, to hear their prayers, to grant them divine support, and to make all things work together for their good. So that, though afflictions abide them, yet they can rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation.

2. They are happy when their peculiar troubles and trials are removed. Divine instruction in adversity teaches them how to feel and act in prosperity. The prophet says, "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." The reason is, adversity, under a divine influence, teaches men how to view and how to use this world as not abusing it; and makes them live a holy, submissive and grateful life. The lessons taught men in adversity prepare them to enjoy every temporal and spiritual favor, as an expression of the goodness and mercy of God. When God has taught men to see him in adversity, they will see him in prosperity. When he has taught them to see and love his justice, they will of course see and love his kindness and beneficence. Those who have suffered the most evil with patience and submission, are prepared to enjoy the most good, even in this present life. There is nothing like afflictions that are sanctified to prepare men to enjoy as well as serve God, while they are passing through the scenes of this trying, probationary state. Nor is this all; for,

3. They shall be happy for ever. When God has used and blessed the means of chastening with any, they are prepared for future as well as present happiness. Having afflicted them for their present good, he will put them in possession of future and eternal good. The Bible abundantly teaches that the benefits of sanctified afflictions continue not only through this world, but the world to come. This the primitive christians confidently expected. "For I reckon," says the apostle, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "For which cause," says he again, "we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And the apostle John represents those who had suffered the most in this world, as enjoying the greatest blessings in heaven. "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And he said to me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple," and "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Thus it appears that blessed are those in adversity and prosperity, in life and in death, and to all eternity, whom God chastens and teaches out of his law.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God sometimes chastens men in order to teach them out of his word, because milder means will not produce that desirable effect, then we must conclude that they are very unwilling to receive divine instruction. If mankind were naturally desirous of being taught of God, they would need no powerful and painful means to persuade and incline them to read, and hear, and understand, and receive the plain and important instructions, which he has graciously given them in his word. Good men, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. David declares, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." And Paul said, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." But all men have naturally a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. Though they love to be taught out of other books, yet they hate to be taught out of the word of God. They love human, but hate divine instruction. They take peculiar pains, and employ peculiar means to avoid it. David says, "the wicked are estranged from the womb; they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." God complains of his ancient people, that when he gave them his commands, "they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their necks stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction." Again he says, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity: but thou saidst, I will not hear; this hath been thy manner from thy youth." There is nothing to which men are more naturally and strongly opposed, than to divine instruction. They will resist all milder means which God uses to lead them to the knowledge of his word and of their own hearts, and, if possible, they will refuse to receive instruction from the most afflictive and painful dispensations of his providence. And they often do completely resist the powerful and painful instructions of his rod, so that God seems discouraged in using it. "Why," says he, "should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." If God had never tried the severe method of instructing men by afflictions, and even by the heaviest afflictions, we could not have known that they were so stout-hearted, and so strenuously opposed to the knowledge of his word and of their own hearts.

2. If it be owing to divine instruction, that divine chastenings do men good, then we may conclude that divine chastenings alone will do them no good. The natural tendency of divine chastenings is, to stir up whatever moral corruption lies in the heart; and they will produce no other effect, unless God himself teaches them to profit. No afflictions, whether light or heavy, will subdue the natural heart, of themselves, but harden it more and more. This has been most clearly manifested by unsanctified afflictions from age to age. Though God's judgments have been abroad in the earth, yet the inhabitants of the world have not generally learned righteousness and obedience, by the things that they have suffered. Divine chastisements were lost upon Pharaoh and his kingdom. Severe trials and troubles and afflictions were lost upon the Israelites whose carcasses fell in the wilderness. The dreadful calamities which fell upon the Jews, both before and after the destruction of Jerusalem, instead of instructing and reforming them, only served to ripen them for an aggravated ruin. Though men are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, and none can escape from lighter or heavier afflictions, yet very few derive any saving benefit from their fiery trials. The reason is, God does not generally intend to sanctify the afflictions which he sends upon nations or individuals; and, whenever he does not sanctify them, they invariably become means of blinding their minds, hardening their hearts, and increasing their native opposition to all means of divine and saving knowledge. Afflictions always become a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death, just as God sees fit to operate upon the hearts of the afflicted. The day of adversity is a day of trial. When God throws men into the furnace of affliction, he will either bring them out purified and refined, or reduce them to dross, which is good for nothing but to be thrown away. They are in a perilous situation, and have reason to tremble for what may be the issue of God's dealings towards them.

3. If God improves the time of affliction as a favorable opportunity of instructing men out of his word in the knowledge of divine things, then the friends of God ought to improve the same favorable season for giving religious instruction to the afflicted. Those who have disregarded religious instruction in days of prosperity, will sometimes readily regard it in days of sorrow and affliction. In such seasons, pious parents have peculiar encouragement to pour instruction into the minds of their ignorant, thoughtless, prayerless children. Pious children have great encouragement to converse freely, affectionately, and solemnly, with their afflicted brothers and sisters. Pious friends have peculiar encouragement to enlighten, coun-

sel, or comfort their afflicted connections or acquaintance. And ministers of the gospel have a peculiar opportunity, which they ought wisely and faithfully to improve, to teach their afflicted people the great and precious truths contained in the word of God, which in days of prosperity they had no disposition to hear and regard. Sometimes a few words, and sometimes one word, fitly and seasonably spoken, will produce a great, a lasting, and saving effect upon the wounded and tender heart of the afflicted. It is certainly working together with God, to improve seasons of affliction to instruct the afflicted, who always need, and not unfrequently desire pious instruction. It is the duty of every one, "in the day of prosperity to be joyful, but in the day of adversity to consider." No afflicted person will deny this to be his duty, and consequently must acknowledge the propriety of his hearkening to any serious religious considerations his pious relatives or friends may think fit to suggest. When God has prepared any by afflictions, to receive instruction from himself, he has equally prepared them to receive instruction from any who are able and disposed to instruct them; and therefore it becomes them to improve the favorable opportunity of doing good; which, if they neglect, may be followed with deplorable consequences.

4. If God employs chastenings as the most powerful means of instructing men in the knowledge of spiritual and divine things, then those who refuse instruction under his correcting hand, have reason to fear he will say concerning them, "Let them alone," that they may perish in their ignorance. He has said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." He said of Israel, "My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust; and they walked in their own counsels." He said to the same people, "Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy sins any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." Our Saviour illustrated this alarming truth by one or two parables. One is the parable of the barren fig-tree. "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" The dresser of the vineyard plead for its being spared one year more, but consented, that if then it continued barren, it might and ought to be cut down. After means had so often failed, it was time to use them no longer. The other parable respected the man that had been awakened and reformed, but relapsed, and his last state was worse than

his first. It is to be feared that those who remain uninstructed, unreformed, and unaffected, under severe and repeated strokes of adversity, will be given up to pine away in their sins, without having any more powerful means of instruction used with them. God is continually confirming the declarations of his word, by the dispensations of his providence. How often are those, who have experienced and abused fiery trials and sore afflictions, left in a far more stupid, hardened, and dangerous state, than they were in before? The reason why afflictions harden those who abuse them, is because they do not regard them as expressions of God's displeasure and indignation towards them. The prophet said, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." But those who abuse the chastenings of the Lord, bear them with fortitude, because they are blind to the hand of God who inflicts them. They applaud themselves for supporting the pain of afflictions, and feel more and more independent of God, and of course more and more disposed to despise him and all the instructions of both his word and providence, and resolve to maintain their peace, by maintaining their stupidity. They know not the day of their visitation, and therefore the things of their peace are hidden from their eyes, until they are destroyed without remedy.

5. Since God oftener instructs men in a time of adversity than in a time of prosperity, they have more reason to fear prosperity than adversity. They generally have no fear of enjoying ease, health, affluence, or any of the blessings of Providence; but they fear suffering pains, sickness, losses, disappointments, and bereavements. They overlook the evils which naturally and generally flow from prosperity, and the benefits which often flow from adversity. Prosperity tends to lead men to forget and forsake God, and to fasten their hearts to the world. But adversity has directly the opposite tendency, to lead men to God, and disengage their hearts from the world. Adversity disposes men to hear divine instruction, and prepares them to derive divine peace and consolation from divine instruction. But prosperity disposes men to disregard divine instruction, and to despise divine peace and consolation. A vast many more have been ruined for time and eternity by prosperity than by adversity. Adversity did Abraham more good than prosperity. Adversity did David more good than prosperity. Adversity did Hezekiah more good than prosperity. Adversity did Manasseh more good than prosperity. Adversity has done good men, in every age of the world, more good than prosperity. Those in prosperity have reason to rejoice with trembling, and those in adversity to rejoice with hope. The

means God is using with the prosperous are the means which he has most commonly used to fit men for destruction; and they will certainly produce this effect, unless he graciously prevents it by filling their hearts with love and gratitude, and causes them to rejoice in his goodness, rather than the good things he bestows upon them. They need to keep their hearts with all diligence, lest the cares and concerns and love of the world choke the instructions of his word, corrupt their hearts, and plunge them in temporal and eternal sorrow. But the means which God is using with the afflicted, are the means which he commonly uses to prepare men for salvation. And they will certainly prepare them for the inheritance of the saints in light, if they endure them with patience and submission, and cordially receive the divine instruction which they are suited to give them. If this be true, have not men more reason to fear prosperity than adversity; and to be more concerned to be thankful in prosperity than to enjoy it, and to be submissive in adversity than to suffer it? If either prosperity or adversity lead them to receive divine instruction, it will do them good; if not, it will do them hurt.

6. Let what has been said lead all to inquire whether they have ever derived any spiritual benefit from adversity. They have all been afflicted in some way or other, and can easily recollect the natural evil they have suffered under the chastising hand of God. They have not forgotten the bitter cups of the wormwood and the gall which God has given them to drink, but have them still in bitter remembrance. But have you derived any spiritual benefit from your fiery trials or sore chastisements, which can enable you to say that it is good for you that you have been afflicted? Have you been taught by your afflictions to search the scriptures, to hear and understand the great and important truths contained in the word of God with pleasure and satisfaction, and to derive light, peace and consolation from his great and precious promises to his mourning and disconsolate children? The Psalmist pronounces all those blessed whom God chastises, and teaches out of his law. Many have felt and said that they have never been more happy, than while suffering chastisement from the hand of their heavenly Father; and that they have enjoyed God, and even the world, more in seasons of adversity, than in seasons of outward prosperity. These are the happy fruits of sanctified afflictions, when God teaches men to profit. But when the heart and hand of God are overlooked in afflictions, they produce very different effects. They darken the understanding, stupify the conscience, corrupt the heart, wound the spirit, and destroy all inward peace and comfort. It is easy for every

one to distinguish such different and opposite effects of affliction, and to determine whether their trials and troubles have done them spiritual good or spiritual evil. God has tried you, to know what is in your heart, and to make you know what manner of spirit you are of. The inquiry concerning your views and feelings, under past afflictions and bereavements, is highly important to yourselves, and must afford you hope or fear. This is more especially and immediately the duty of those who are still mourning and suffering under the afflictive hand of God. Though they have experienced many trials, and suffered many afflictions before, yet the present bereavement of an amiable wife, a dutiful daughter, and affectionate sister, is one of the sorest afflictions that any of the mourners have ever been called to endure. God is now using some of the best means to instruct you, and giving you the best opportunity to receive his instructions. He is teaching you the frailty and uncertainty of life, the vanity of all earthly hopes and prospects, and the importance of deriving your highest peace and consolation from the precious truths and promises of the gospel. The belief and love of divine truth will afford you comfort and support under your present afflictions, prepare you for any new troubles or trials, and above all, fit you for leaving this evil world, and entering into that rest which remains for the people of God. The grave is waiting for all, and sooner or later all must lodge in that dark and silent mansion; but the aged and infirm are just ready to step into it. We know not, however, who stands next on death's commission; whether the aged, or the middle-aged, or the young.

Finally, this subject opens a gloomy and awful prospect to those who have never profited in the school of affliction. If God treats men so severely to make them receive the instructions of his word, how much more severely will he treat those who despise, disregard and reject the instructions of his word? "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." And, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

# SERMON XXXVII.

## VIEW OF ETERNITY.

OCTOBER 19, 1823.

WHILE we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. — 2 CORINTHIANS, iv. 18.

THE gospel has brought life and immortality to light. It has opened the invisible scenes of the invisible world to the eye of faith. Those who believe the gospel, and live by faith on the Son of God, live in the view of eternity. The apostle says in the thirteenth verse of the context, that he believed the gospel which he preached. "We also believe, and therefore speak." And as he lived in the belief of the gospel, so he lived in the view of eternity, which enabled him to form some just views of his present sufferings and future enjoyments, and of all other present and future objects. Such views he supposes were not peculiar to himself, but common to christians in general. "Knowing," says he, "that he who raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." These last words, in their proper connection, plainly teach us,

That christians live under the habitual view and influence of eternity.

I shall first consider the view which christians have of eternity; and then the influence which that view has upon them.

I. I am to show that christians live under the habitual view of eternity. This will appear, if we consider,

1. That they have had that clear and lively view of eternity which is commonly impressed on the conscience previously to a saving change. The first step which God usually takes, in forming the vessels of mercy, is to open their eyes, and make them look into eternity. This alarms their fears, and awakens their consciences, and throws them into deep distress. In this situation he holds them for days, or weeks, or months, or a longer space of time. Under such awakenings and convictions, he impresses on their minds a deep and lasting sense of eternity, which they never forget. For though the change of heart, which they afterwards experience, causes their painful views of eternity to subside, yet it produces a joyful view of the invisible world, which lays a foundation for their habitually keeping eternity in view, or having their conversation in heaven.

2. Christians, who understand and believe the gospel, consider all things as intimately connected with eternity; which leads them to live in the habitual view of it. Not only sickness, and sorrow, and death, and all other gloomy objects, lead christians to view eternity, but time, and all the objects of time, appear to them as bearing a serious and important relation to eternity. Eternity therefore is in all their thoughts. The same scenes and objects which hide eternity from the view of other men, bring eternity into their view; because they habitually realize the inseparable connection between things seen and unseen, things present and things future, and things temporal and things eternal. As they trace all secondary causes up to the supreme First Cause, so the supreme First Cause leads their thoughts into that vast eternity which he inhabits, and in which he has fixed the throne of his glory.

3. Christians live habitually in the view of eternity, because the objects of their supreme affections are there. Our Saviour says, where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also. The treasure of christians lies in heaven; and therefore their views, their desires, and their affections centre there. There is God, and Christ, and the spirits of just men made perfect, who hold the supreme place in their hearts. Those who have risen with Christ, set their affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; and seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. They habitu-

ally carry their thoughts into eternity, because they habitually live in the love of the great and glorious objects of the eternal world. They love to live by faith, as well as other men do by sight. They love to contemplate upon their future and eternal inheritance, as well as other men do upon their present temporal possessions. They therefore habitually live in the view of eternity, because they habitually love to live so.

4. The scripture represents good men as living habitually in the view of the invisible world. We are told that Enoch walked with God; which implies that he lived habitually in view of him who inhabits eternity. Moses lived as seeing him who is invisible, and having an habitual respect to the recompense of reward. Job saw his Redeemer by the eye of faith, and lived in the habitual expectation of seeing him face to face. David assures us that he habitually lived in the view of God, and of a blessed eternity. "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope; for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." If we now turn to the eleventh of Hebrews, we shall find that all the ancient patriarchs lived habitually in that faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. "These," says the apostle, "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." According to this representation of the ancient saints, they not only now and then had a faint view of eternity, but they lived habitually under a realizing sense of future and eternal realities. The apostles and primitive christians also lived in the same manner. The apostle Paul, speaking in their name, says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." This looks like their living in the habitual view of eternity; and what he says in the next chapter, and in the next words after our text, more fully expresses the same idea. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved,

we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven." "Now he that hath wrought us for this self-same thing is God, who also hath given us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight." In another place he says, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." And agreeably to this the apostle says to christians in general, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season (if need be) ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Thus it appears that true christians look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen; that they have their conversation in heaven; and that they habitually live in the view of eternity. I now proceed, as proposed,

II. To consider the habitual influence which the habitual view of eternity has upon christians. Eternity is the greatest idea that ever entered the mind of man, that ever entered the mind of Gabriel, or that ever existed in the mind of God. God can number all the stars of heaven. God can number all the drops in the ocean. God can number all the sands on the sea shore. God can number all the particles in the whole material system. God can number every creature and every object in the whole circle of creation. But to speak with reverence, God cannot number the days, or years, or ages of eternity. This is absolute infinity, which never has been and never can be comprehended. After ages and ages have rolled away; yea, after millions and millions of ages are gone, our idea of eternity may be enlarged, but its duration will still remain unlimited and incomprehensible. Immense duration gives immense importance to every being and object with which it is inseparably connected. Eternal existence gives immense importance to the Deity, to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the angels

and the spirits of just men made perfect, to the holiness and happiness of heaven, to the sin and misery of hell, and in a word, to all the invisible world. Accordingly, when we would represent the invisible world in the most solemn and important light, we call it eternity itself; and by going into another world, we always mean going into a boundless eternity. Now, since eternity gives such immense importance to every being and object with which it is inseparably connected, it must have a very impressive influence on the minds of christians, who live habitually under a realizing view of it. This leads me to say, in the first place,

1. That the habitual view of eternity must give christians an habitual sense of the shortness of time. Eternity sinks time to a moment. Those who habitually realize eternity, habitually realize the shortness of time. Jacob said, "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." David, and Job, and the prophets, and the apostles, viewed time as a moment or a vapor. Such must be the appearance of time to those who live habitually in the view of the invisible and eternal world.

2. The habitual view of eternity impresses on the minds of christians a deep and solemn sense of their own frailty and mortality. Death and eternity are so nearly connected, that the one spontaneously brings the other into view. The habitual view of eternity made Paul die daily; and it has the same effect upon all christians. They realize that their lives are constantly shortening, and that they are daily drawing nearer and nearer to their long home. The christian does not feel and say with the worldling, I shall live for ever, and never see corruption; but he feels and says with Joshua, I am this day going the way of all the earth, and there may be but a step between me and eternity.

3. The habitual view of eternity gives christians not only a realizing sense of their frailty and mortality, but also a realizing sense of the vanity of all temporal enjoyments. The greatest and best things that the world contains appear like mere trifles and vanities to christians, when they carry their thoughts into eternity. They then view the world and all its enjoyments very much as sinners do when they are dying and going out of it. So Paul felt, when he said to christians, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Peter tells christians, "You took joyfully the spoiling of your goods; knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." Though Solomon was once carried away by the riches, honors and enjoyments of the world, yet when he drew near the closing scenes of life and had a more realizing sense of death, judgment and eternity, he

exclaimed, " Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" The habitual view of eternity sinks the world and all its enjoyments in the estimation of christians, and leads them to value all beings and objects according to their real worth and importance in another world.

4. The habitual view of eternity gives christians a proper sense of the worth of the human soul. God has made man wiser than the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven, and endued him with a rational and immortal soul, which gives him the preëminence, in point of importance, to all the lower creation. Every human soul shall exist for ever, and be for ever happy or miserable. It is only in the view of eternity that its worth and importance can be justly estimated. But christians, who live in the habitual view of eternity, can and do view it according to its eternal and inestimable value. The immortality of the soul gives it infinite worth and importance. Those who never carry their thoughts into eternity, never have a just view of the vast importance of their precious and immortal souls. But christians, who believe the gospel, which has unfolded the invisible world, and brought life and immortality to light, view their own souls and the souls of all men as more precious and valuable than the whole world. And it is their heart's desire and prayer to God, that they may be saved from the wrath to come, and be for ever happy beyond the grave.

5. The view which christians have of eternity impresses their minds with a deep conviction of the value and importance of all the means of grace. They have found that the Bible, the Sabbath, and the ordinances of the gospel, have had a powerful, a happy and saving effect upon their minds. They ascribe all their peculiar knowledge of God, of themselves, of time and eternity, to the light they have derived from these means of grace. They are sensible that they would have lived without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world, and been still strangers to the covenant of promise, if they had not enjoyed and improved the precious privileges of the gospel. These means of grace they constantly prize and improve, in order to enjoy comfort, grow in knowledge, and make advances in the christian and divine life. Though mankind generally make light of the gospel and all the means of grace, yet christians, who live in the light of eternity, view all religious advantages as infinitely important to themselves, and to all who enjoy them. They know that the gospel is an everlasting gospel; that its truths are everlasting truths; that they will make everlasting impressions on their minds; and that they will prove a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death

to all eternity; which stamps an infinite importance upon them. This inspires them with a zeal to read the Bible, sanctify the Sabbath, and attend divine institutions themselves, and to lead others to improve the means of grace to their own spiritual and eternal benefit.

6. The habitual view of eternity never fails to dispose christians to order all their secular concerns with discretion, and bring them into subserviency to their eternal interests. These things, which are seen and temporal, appear light while they look at things which are not seen, and which are eternal. They see the propriety and feel the force of what Christ says to them. "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." They sincerely desire to bring all their secular designs and pursuits into subordination to their spiritual concerns, and to eat and drink, and do every thing to the glory of God. While they live in the exercise of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, they gain the victory over the world, and the things of the world, and make them all the means of laying up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.

7. The habitual view of eternity animates and encourages christians to live a life of usefulness in this world. They see much to be done for the temporal and spiritual benefit of their fellow men, and they have but a short time to serve God and their generation in this life. They know that God has set them apart for himself, and requires them to be instrumental in promoting his glory and the best good of their fellow men, while the day of life lasts; and has solemnly admonished them that the night of death will put a final period to their usefulness on earth. He says to every man, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." But so long as christians are allowed to live in the world, they have great encouragement to be steadfast, and indefatigable in discharging all the relative duties of life; for their labor shall not be in vain to themselves nor to their fellow men, but meet a glorious reward.

8. There is another great and happy effect which the habitual view of eternity has upon christians; and that is, to support and comfort them under all the trials, afflictions and bereavements which they are called to experience in this present evil world. This happy effect the apostles and primitive christians derived from viewing all their troubles and afflictions in the light of eternity. "We are troubled on every side," says

the apostle, "yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." The same support and consolation all christians derive from viewing their light and momentary trials and sufferings in the light of that vast eternity, where all their tears shall be wiped away, and an eternal weight of glory bestowed upon them.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said that christians have reason to be willing to die. Death is theirs, and will convey them into that blessed eternity which they have contemplated with peculiar pleasure and satisfaction. Good men have often been willing to die, and make the happy transition out of time into eternity, in order to enjoy a blessed immortality beyond the grave. Job said, "I would not live alway." "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." David said to God, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness." Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." All the primitive christians had the same desire, and spoke the same language. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." It is not strange that those who have lived in the habitual and joyful view of eternity, should be willing and even desirous to leave things seen and temporal to behold and enjoy things unseen and eternal. They see something worth dying for, which gives them a triumph over the king of terrors, and enables them to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" But if such are the happy views that christians may have of God, while they see through a glass darkly, what glorious and astonishing views must they have of him, when they first open their eyes in eternity, and find themselves in his presence, and surrounded by all the heavenly hosts! Every being and every object will bear the stamp of eternity. The holiness they see will be

eternal holiness, and the happiness they enjoy will be eternal happiness. They will there shine forth in all the beauties of holiness in the kingdom of their Father, in whose presence is fulness of joy, at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.

2. If christians have reason to rejoice in the view of a happy eternity, then sinners have reason to tremble in the view of a miserable eternity. They have nothing to hope for, but every thing to fear, beyond the grave. They choose to have their portion in this world; but they must soon leave this world, and go into eternity, where their souls must exist as long as the souls of saints, but without the least source of happiness. All that they loved, or valued, or enjoyed in this world will be for ever removed from them; and they will find nothing in eternity to please their eyes, or their ears, or their hearts, but every thing to strike terror and consternation into their minds. They will meet with no friends, but with fixed and eternal enemies. If they look up to heaven, they can see no source of light or hope there. If they look into their own hearts, they can find no source of light or hope there. If they look back upon this world, they can think of nothing but what fills them with self-reproach and self-condemnation. If they look around them, they can see nothing but what will augment their misery, and if they look forward, they can see nothing but endless darkness and despair. This is not an unscriptural and visionary representation of the state of incorrigible sinners beyond the grave; and have they not reason to tremble, when they carry their thoughts into eternity, and realize their future and eternal doom? O how must they feel, when they open their eyes in eternity, and find the gate of heaven shut against them, and the gate of destruction open to receive them! Can their hands be strong, or their hearts endure, in the day when God shall cast them into the bottomless pit? While you are standing upon the borders of this pit, be entreated to escape the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life.

3. If eternity has an habitual and powerful influence upon christians, who have an habitual view of it, then we may conclude that sinners in general are extremely stupid in respect to their future state. God has told them that they are rational and immortal creatures; that their souls will not die with their bodies; that when they leave this, they will go into another world; and that they will there exist for ever completely happy, or miserable. He has told them that while they continue in the state of nature, they are dead in trespasses and sins; that they are unfit for his kingdom; that they stand condemned by his holy law, and that they are constantly exposed to be called into a miserable eternity. But, notwithstanding all this light

in their understanding, they cast off fear, and live in great ease and security. This looks strange at first view. But the cause is obvious. They banish death and eternity from their view. And so long as they can keep future and eternal objects out of view, and the world in their hearts, they see nothing to disturb their peace, or to alarm their fears. This extreme stupidity of sinners is certainly owing to their habitually keeping eternity out of view; for if they would only realize that future and eternal misery to which they are exposed, a sense of danger would alarm their fears, and destroy all their pleasing prospects, and plunge them in deep anxiety and distress. Whenever God awakens sinners, and causes them to realize that they are going into a miserable eternity, it never fails to throw them into the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. The most stupid, hardened and stout-hearted sinners cannot help trembling like Felix and Belshazzar, when they look into eternity, and realize their lying down in eternal sorrow. They are guilty, therefore, of inexcusable folly and stupidity, in banishing eternity from their thoughts. They bear the same relation to eternity that saints do, and must as certainly take up their everlasting residence in it; and it certainly as deeply concerns them to live in an habitual view of eternity. But their supreme love to the world and the things of the world so darkens their understanding and stupifies their conscience, that they cry to themselves peace and safety, while their feet stand on slippery places, and they know not but the next step they take they may slide into the world of eternal wo. Such stupidity appears astonishing to those who habitually realize eternity, and it will sooner or later appear still more astonishing to those who take pains to shut eternity out of sight. If they are wise, they will look into eternity, and consider their latter end; but if they will not hear Moses, nor the prophets, they must bear the fatal effects of their voluntary stupidity, and lie down in everlasting sorrow.

4. So long as sinners live without a just and realizing view of eternity, they can have no just and realizing view of themselves, or of the world in which they live. This world is inseparably connected with another. Things seen are inseparably connected with things unseen. Things temporal are inseparably connected with things eternal. The temporal existence of sinners is inseparably connected with their eternal existence. The value of all earthly objects is to be estimated according to their duration. Houses and their furniture are to be estimated according to their duration. Living creatures are to be estimated according to the length of their lives. And mankind are to be estimated according to the duration of their existence. Neither the world, nor the things of the world, will

be of the least value after they cease to exist; and should a time ever come when mankind cease to exist, they would then become perfectly useless and worthless. It is impossible, therefore, that sinners should form a just estimate of themselves, or of the world and the things of the world, without viewing them in the light of eternity. As soon as they view the world and the things of the world in the light of eternity, they appear to them as they did to Solomon when he realized eternity — "vanity of vanities." But when they view themselves in the light of eternity, they astonishingly rise in worth and importance. Their own souls and the souls of others appear infinitely precious. So long as sinners live without a realizing view of eternity, they form an unjust and dangerous opinion of themselves, of their fellow men, and of the world and all things in it. They live, and act, and think, as though they were living, and acting, and thinking in a fairy land, and had only a visionary existence. But when they come to themselves, as the prodigal son did, the world loses all its charms, the things of the world all their importance, and eternity absorbs all their attention and concern.

Now, perhaps, one and another is ready to say, I believe all this to be true. I believe a realizing view of eternity would render my mind solemn, absorb my attention, and convince me of the worth of my soul, and of the importance of securing its future and everlasting happiness. But how shall I get a realizing sense of eternity? I have often desired and endeavored to get such a sense of eternity; but my desires and efforts have often been sadly disappointed, and I cannot account for it. But you might easily account for it, if you would critically attend to the mixed desires of your heart, and distinguish your stronger from your weaker desires. Your habitual desires are stronger than your occasional desires. You habitually desire to live in the world, and to enjoy the world as long as you live in it, without interruption. This habitual desire is vastly stronger than your occasional desire to look into eternity, and prepare for it. And as soon as your occasional desire begins to be strong enough to disturb your peace, your habitual desire to enjoy the world in peace rises with redoubled power and influence, to check, restrain and completely destroy your desire to look into, and prepare for, what appears a painful eternity. The truth is, every sinner's heart is full of inconsistent desires, and he is holden by the stronger cords of habitual desires. This was the case of Balaam. He desired to die the death of the righteous, and to be happy in his future and eternal state; but he had an habitual and stronger desire to enjoy the wages of unrighteousness. His habitual desire to

be happy in this world overcame and destroyed his desire to be happy in the world to come. The men of the world are all running greedily after the error of Balaam, preferring things seen to things not seen, and things temporal to things eternal; which, unless they repent, will inevitably lead them to destruction.

5. Since christians view themselves and all things in the light of eternity, they enjoy the world far better than the men of the world do. Though these all possess as large a portion of the world as christians possess, and generally a much larger portion, yet they never enjoy it so well as christians enjoy it. The reason is, they desire and expect more happiness from the world than it does or can afford them; which subjects them to continual disappointment and vexation of spirit. They view the world and the things of the world as unconnected with eternity; and, of course, they form a false opinion of the tendency and design of all earthly objects and enjoyments, which they never properly use, but always abuse. The world and the things of the world are not designed nor adapted to satisfy the vast desires of rational and immortal beings; but the men of the world place their supreme happiness in its unsatisfactory and short-lived enjoyments, which perverts the design of God in giving the world to them, and turns it into a curse, instead of a blessing. The prosperity of the wicked, as they improve it, always tends to destroy them. But christians, who view the world in connection with eternity, use it as not abusing it. They employ it to answer the important purposes for which it was made and given to the children of men. Whether they possess more or less of the world, they enjoy all they possess. They do not desire nor expect to derive their supreme happiness from any or all their worldly possessions, but mean to improve them to promote their present comfort and usefulness, and to prepare them for their future and eternal inheritance in heaven. The apostles, who kept their eyes and hearts fixed on eternity, viewed and enjoyed the world better than any sinners ever did or ever could. They say of themselves, "as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Every worldly-minded man has found Solomon's observation to be true: "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase." Real christians, who habitually live in the view of eternity, follow the direction of their Saviour: They lay not up for themselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but they lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and

steal: and where their treasure is, there their hearts are also. They view the world and all it contains in relation to eternity, and employ all they possess to promote the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom; which gives them present enjoyment, and secures a future and eternal reward.

6. It appears from what has been said, that an habitual view of eternity has a happy and powerful tendency to guard christians against an undue conformity to the customs and manners of the world. There are many things highly esteemed among the men of the world which are an abomination in the sight of God; and would appear so to all men, if they viewed them in the light of eternity. All the customs and manners of the world are designed to gratify the heart, and stupify the conscience, and put future and eternal objects out of sight. And to guard against the spirit and tendency of such customs and manners, a realizing and habitual view of eternity is the most effectual method christians can take. While they keep eternity in view, they will not consider the customs and manners of the world as innocent, or mere venial evils, but carefully and conscientiously avoid them. They will not conform to the world in wasting their time in idle recreations and fashionable amusements. Nor will they waste their property in any of the fashionable modes of prodigality and dissipation. Nor will they pervert the design, or violate the sanctity of the Lord's day, by spending it as an unholy and common day. Nor will they neglect the duties of the closet, of the family, or the sanctuary. Though the men of the world approve, and practice, and highly esteem these things, yet they appear to christians, in the light of eternity, as very criminal and displeasing to God. So long, therefore, as christians keep their eyes and their hearts fixed upon the invisible objects of the invisible world, they hate, condemn and avoid every mode of living, acting and thinking, which tends to obstruct them in duty, or alienate their affections from God, however much it may be esteemed and applauded by the unwise, unholy and ungodly. Moses lived as seeing him who is invisible, and the apostles looked not on things seen and temporal, but on things unseen and eternal. They lived by faith, and not by sight; and by this non-conformity to the world, they condemned the world, promoted the religion they professed, and secured their own future and eternal blessedness.

7. If christians live habitually in the view of eternity, then their future prospects are continually brightening. The more steadily and joyfully they carry their thoughts into eternity, and contemplate the holiness and felicity of the heavenly world, the more their views are enlarged, their holy affections excited

and strengthened, and their highest hopes confirmed. As their temporal prospects diminish, their eternal hopes are enlarged. As they approach nearer and nearer to the end of time, and to the verge of eternity, they feel less and less attached to the world they are leaving, and more and more attached to the world whither they are tending. This we find was the case of the ancient saints and primitive christians. Their path was like the rising sun, which shines brighter and brighter to the perfect day. David died in hope and peace. Simeon died in hope and peace. The primitive christians were willing to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. Paul triumphed in the nearest prospect of death and eternity. We cannot conceive of any thing better suited to remove the sting of death and the terrors of the grave, than an habitual and familiar view of that blessed eternity into which they are about to enter, and in which they hope to dwell for ever. Sincere, growing christians see good reasons to go on their way rejoicing in the hope of the glory and enjoyment of God.

8. We learn from what has been said, that the hopes and prospects of sinners are constantly fading and vanishing. They are all built upon things seen and temporal. The fashion of this world is constantly passing away, and consequently all the hopes founded upon it are fading and passing away with it. But if the objects and enjoyments of the world should not be removed from sinners so long as they live, yet death will put an everlasting period to them. All their worldly sources of happiness are leaving them, and lessening in value every year and every day, and the moment they go into eternity they will be for ever out of their sight, but not out of their mind. They will be a source of painful and eternal reflection. They will see and feel that they have disappointed all their hopes, and shut them out of the kingdom of heaven. They will find themselves without the least source of comfort or ground of hope. This is the melancholy and growing prospect of darkness, which keeps them all their life in bondage through fear of death and a miserable eternity. They may be told that they are safe; but they cannot think so, if they will only look into eternity; which has destroyed the hopes of thousands of thoughtless sinners in a dying hour. But, if they should have "no bands in their death," they will be the more disappointed and the more wretched when they open their eyes in eternity.

This subject now appeals to all, whether they are, or are not, christians. You have seen how christians live habitually in the view of eternity. Be so good to yourselves as to compare your views with theirs. Have you had a realizing view of eternity? Have you had a deep and permanent view of eter-

nity? Have you had a joyful view of eternity? Have your views of eternity become more and more habitual and impressive, and have they produced an increasing practical influence upon your hearts and lives? These are plain, and intelligible, and interesting queries to all.

But they are especially so to the aged, who stand so near to eternity, and to the bereaved, who have lately been called to look into eternity, where the object or objects of their love, veneration, or respect, are gone, and where they must soon follow them. Nor is the duty of looking into eternity, and preparing for it, uninteresting to the young. They have immortal souls, which are inseparably connected with eternity, in which they must take up their everlasting residence. Who among the aged, the young, or the afflicted, live in an habitual and joyful view of eternity, and are waiting for their appointed change? You are safe and happy. But those who put far away the evil day, and dread to look into eternity, are now unhappy; and unless they embrace the hope set before them in the gospel, must perish.

# SERMON XXXVIII.

## SAINTS WITH CHRIST IN HEAVEN.

FEBRUARY 25, 1827. DEATH OF MRS. MARY METCALF.

FATHER, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am. — JOHN, xvii. 24.

As CHRIST knew the precise time when he should leave the world, so he made a wise preparation for that great and solemn event. The evening before his crucifixion he celebrated the Passover, and instituted the memorials of his own death. He washed and wiped his disciples' feet, for an example of mutual love and condescension to all his followers in time to come. He entered into a free and familiar conversation with his disciples, in which he forewarned them of their dangers, inculcated their duty, and suggested the best sources of consolation. He then lifted up his eyes to heaven, and addressed his Father in a very solemn, affectionate and appropriate prayer for all his present and future friends, which he closed with this comprehensive petition: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am." By those whom his Father had given him, he meant all those who were chosen from eternity to be heirs of salvation. These persons the Father had promised to give him as the proper reward for his incarnation, sufferings, and death on the cross, to make atonement for the sins of the world, and open the way for the free and consistent exercise of pardoning mercy to all returning, penitent, believing sinners. Upon this ground he could with propriety address his Father in the language of the text: "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me," &c. He makes a claim of his promised reward, and in a manner which strongly expresses his ardent desire of having what he

claims, both as an expression of his Father's love to him, and of his love to the elect. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." The text in this connection suggests a proper subject for our present meditation. It is this:

That Christ desires to have all the heirs of salvation to be with him where he is. I shall consider,

I. Where he is.

II. When he desires that the heirs of salvation should be with him.

III. Why he desires to have them where he is.

I. We are to consider where Christ is. Though this may seem to be a point which needs no illustration or proof, yet it is really worthy of particular consideration, because there is a diversity of opinions about the place where Christ now is, and always will be. The information which he has given us, ought to remove all ground of doubt or conjecture upon this point. He says himself, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." And again he says, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." He uniformly made such declarations as these concerning the place from whence he came, which the Jews understood to mean the place where God has fixed his own throne, surrounded by all holy beings. And he as plainly declared that he should return to heaven, as that he came down from thence. This declaration his disciples saw verified with their own eyes. For after he had risen from the dead and repeatedly appeared to them, "he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." There is therefore no room to doubt whether heaven be not the place where Christ now is. But we are told that he will return again to this world. This the angels told the spectators of his ascension to heaven. "While they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." And the apostle tells us, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." But though it appears that Christ was in heaven before

he came into this world, that he has since gone to heaven, and that he will return to this world once more at the last day, yet some may still ask, how does it appear that he will, after the day of judgment, go back to heaven and there reside for ever? I answer, this clearly appears from what Christ and the apostles have said upon the subject. Christ assured his disciples, that "in my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." We know that his Father's house is in heaven. There he says he will prepare a place for his followers, and there they shall be with him. Heaven, therefore, is the only place where Christ and his friends will for ever reside. He intimated the same thing in his representation of the process at the last day, as well as in the parable of the tares. In that parable the wicked are represented as destroyed, but the righteous as shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. And in respect to the last day it is said: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." This is the kingdom of the Father, where Christ says there are many mansions prepared and preparing for the everlasting abode of his friends. We have as much reason to believe that Christ is now in heaven, and always will be there, as that he ever came down from heaven and returned thither. Let us consider,

II. When Christ desires to have the heirs of salvation with him where he is. Here it must be premised, that he does not desire the heirs of salvation to be with him before they exist. There is ground to believe, that much the largest number of those who shall be heirs of salvation have not yet come into existence. These cannot be where Christ is, in his Father's kingdom. Nor does Christ desire that any of the heirs of salvation should be with him, who are yet in their native state of total depravity. Nor does he desire that any of his chosen ones, who are now on the stage of life, fulfilling his commands, and promoting his glory, should be with him, until they have finished their course, and done all which he has for them to do before they leave the world. But he does desire that every subject of grace and heir of glory should be with him as soon

as he closes his eyes in death. This he has given all his followers sufficient reason to believe, for their consolation and support in their dying hour. He has brought life and immortality to light. He declared that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were in the full enjoyment of God. He taught his disciples not to fear them that kill the body, because their souls would survive their body in a state of activity and felicity. He taught that all who believed in him should never die, or cease to exist and be happy beyond the grave. He assured the dying, penitent, believing malefactor, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." He made all his sincere followers believe that they should, at death, immediately pass into glory. Accordingly Stephen in his last moments professed this belief, and told his persecutors, while steadfastly looking into heaven, "I see the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." It is added, "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit." His prayer was undoubtedly heard, and his precious and immortal spirit was immediately admitted into one of those mansions in heaven, which Christ had gone before to prepare for him. Paul repeatedly expressed his belief and hope, that death would translate real christians from earth to heaven. Once he said in respect to himself, that he was in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to live, and a desire to depart and be with Christ, which was far better. Once he says, in the name of christians in general, "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." He exhorts christians "to be followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises, and compose the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven." Christ has been, and still is receiving the heirs of salvation into his kingdom of glory, as soon as they have left these clayey tabernacles, and have been made meet to be partakers of their heavenly inheritance. This leads me to consider,

III. Why Christ desires that all those should be with him, whom he has redeemed from among men, and made heirs of salvation. Here I would observe,

1. Christ desires this for his own sake. His redeemed ones will promote both his glory and felicity. They will be the most excellent and amiable characters among all the intelligent creation. Being washed and purified from all moral pollution, they will shine in all the beauties of holiness. To the principalities above they will appear astonishing monuments of the redeeming love of Christ. They had seen them in this world, in all their wretchedness, deformity and guilt, hateful and hating one another, destitute of every amiable quality, and full

of every vile affection, which rendered them deserving of the severest marks of the divine displeasure. But now their hearts are changed, and their condition reversed. They are no longer enemies, but friends of God. They are no longer children of wrath, but heirs of glory. And all this is owing to the grace and condescension of Christ, who suffered and died, that they might live. What a glorious appearance will millions and millions of our fallen race exhibit in heaven, when they shall all come out of great tribulation, and wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb! What glory and honor will they reflect upon Christ, who loved them, and died for them, and made them kings and priests to God! But they will glorify Christ actively as well as passively. They will feel and express their gratitude and praise to Christ for all he has done and suffered for them, in a new song, which none of the rest of the heavenly world can ever learn. "And I looked," says John in vision, "and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts and the elders: and no man could learn that song, but the hundred forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." And they said with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessings; for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests." Thus Christ will be for ever glorified in and by his saints, and admired by all that believe. For his own glory, therefore, he desires that all whom his Father has given him should be with him where he is, and be employed in celebrating the riches of his grace to all eternity. For by thus promoting his glory, they will equally promote his perfect felicity. He will for ever delight in the sincere homage and praise of his redeemed ones, whom he will for ever love infinitely more than they can love him. It is said, "When Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of the world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." Those whom he has redeemed, sanctified and glorified, will have a deeper interest in his affections than any other of his intelligent creatures. They were the joy set before him from eternity; they always lay nearest to his heart; and, while he sees them prostrating themselves before his throne, and with one voice paying him the everlasting debt of grati-

tude which they owe him, it must afford him the purest pleasure, satisfaction and enjoyment. So that it is easy to see one reason why he desires to have all the heirs of salvation with him where he is, to augment his own everlasting blessedness. But,

2. He desires that they should be with him for their sake, as well as for his own. He always placed his good in their good, and suffered and died for their good. He must, therefore, desire to raise their happiness as high as their natures will admit. He knows what will raise their felicity to the highest degree, and he designs to use all means necessary to effect this purpose. He knows that they cannot be so happy any where else, as in his kingdom and presence; of course, his love to them inspires him with an ardent desire to bring them to be with him where he is. Accordingly he told his beloved disciples, just as he was parting with them, that he would not long leave them comfortless, but come again and receive them to himself, and bring them into the everlasting mansions which he was going to prepare for them. This assurance in their mournful situation was directly suited to soothe their minds, and alleviate their sorrow, and afford consolation to all the heirs of salvation, both in life and death.

For to be where he is, is to be in the happiest place in the universe. The inspired writers have employed the grandest images in nature to display the glory of heaven. It is the most beautiful and magnificent place that infinite power, wisdom and goodness could form. There is every thing there to gratify holy, rational and immortal creatures. It is free from all natural and moral evil. Every thing is banished from it, that could offend the eye, or ear, or heart of a holy and intelligent creature; while, on the other hand, there is every thing there that can please every power and faculty of every pure and enlightened mind. So that merely being where Christ is must be a permanent source of real felicity.

But there is something far better implied in the promise of Christ to the heirs of salvation, that they shall be where he is; it implies that they shall be with him in the nearest and happiest union and communion. He is represented as the head, and they the members. He is represented as the vine, and they the branches. He is represented as dwelling in their hearts, and they as dwelling in his, or that they shall be one in affection and enjoyment. These figures denote the nearest union and communion possible between Christ, and those whom he has redeemed by his blood, when they arrive in heaven. They will see his face, hear his voice, and undoubtedly hold a free and intimate intercourse with him. For he has told them that

what they know not now, they shall know hereafter. This seems to intimate that he will be their future and eternal teacher. And if the hearts of his disciples burned within them, while he taught them on earth, how much higher will their joy and admiration rise, when they shall be far better prepared and disposed to hear and understand his instructions in the heavenly world. With what vast attention and avidity will they hear him converse with Adam and Enoch, Moses and Elias, the prophets and the apostles, about the works of creation, providence, and redemption. Will they not be ready to say with Peter, James and John, on the mount of transfiguration, "It is good for us to be here?" The presence and intercourse of Christ with his redeemed will perpetually fill their hearts with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Farthermore, their being all collected together from every age and nation of the world, and perfectly united in loving, praising and serving their gracious and glorious Redeemer, Sanctifier and Creator, will give a peculiar sweetness and zest to all their other enjoyments. Their holiness and happiness will be social and mutual. They will astonish one another with their felicity, which will exceed all that their eyes had seen, or their ears heard, or their hearts conceived. Their numbers will be immense and innumerable. Their characters will be as various as they are beautiful and numerous. And when they come to learn, as they will learn, why they were chosen, and sanctified, and glorified, rather than thousands whom they see are separated from God, and from all good, their gratitude and admiration of the sovereign grace of the ever blessed Trinity will swell beyond all present description or conception. All this Christ knows, and therefore desires that all the heirs of salvation should be with him in his Father's house.

### IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said in this discourse, that the place of future happiness beyond the grave is more clearly revealed under the gospel, than it was under the law. There is no other subject, perhaps, upon which mankind have entertained such various, inconsistent and absurd notions, as that of the soul, and what becomes of it after death. Nor is it strange that the whole heathen world, who are destitute of divine revelation, should be involved in great darkness and ignorance upon this subject. While they judge of the nature and effects of death by its mere visible appearance, it is natural for them to conclude that it puts a final period to the activity, sensibil-

ity and existence of the soul. Accordingly many of them have either doubted or denied the immortality of the soul beyond the grave. Even Cicero and some of their most learned moralists, doubted whether the soul survived the body. Cicero said he hoped the soul would exist after death, and that good men would be happy in a future state, though he had his doubts upon the subject. But the unlearned heathens have generally entertained a stronger belief and hope of a future place of happiness and misery than the learned, who have formed their opinion by the exercise of their reasoning powers; for they found their belief and hope upon long and immemorial tradition. Accordingly our missionaries among the pagans tell us that their rites on funeral occasions plainly indicate that they feel concerned about the happiness or misery of their departed friends. Bishop Warburton, in his book concerning the divine legation of Moses, exerts all his ingenuity and learning to prove that the immortality of the soul and a future state was not revealed under the Old Testament. Later still, Dr. Priestly has labored to prove that the soul dies with the body. Though it may be readily allowed that the Mosaic dispensation is darker than the christian, and that the former contains less information about a future state than the present, yet it cannot be justly denied that a future state was revealed in the Old Testament. Moses said before his death, in the hearing of all the congregation of Israel, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." The life and death here mentioned are not temporal, but eternal life and death beyond the grave. But still it is true, that Christ revealed a future state of happiness and misery much more clearly than Moses did. Christ often and plainly spoke about the place of future happiness and misery, and about the final separation of the righteous and the wicked in another world. He expressly said that Moses and Elias, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were alive, though their bodies had long crumbled to dust. He represented Lazarus as happy, and Dives as miserable, after death. He represented the process of the day of judgment in a plain, striking, solemn light, and the everlasting joys and sorrows which will flow from it. Though his descriptions of heaven and hell are somewhat figurative, yet they are very intelligible. He has given us as clear an idea of heaven, where he is, and where he desires the heirs of salvation should be, as we have of any very distant place in this world. Those who have been in London have described it as a large, grand, and beautiful city, full of people, enjoying every source of temporal happi-

ness. Christ, who came down from heaven, has described it as a large, glorious, and beautiful city, surrounded by gates and barriers, filled with rational, holy, immortal creatures, who enjoy every source of holy happiness. This description of heaven is perfectly plain and intelligible to all under the gospel. And he has given as plain and intelligible descriptions of the abodes of the miserable. Those under the full blaze of gospel light must be inexcusable, if they think or say that they do not know that there is such a place as heaven, or such a place as hell; or whether the soul shall exist after death; or whether the righteous shall be for ever happy, and the unrighteous for ever miserable in another world. We must believe what the inspired apostle asserts to be true, that our Saviour Jesus Christ "hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

2. Since Christ is now in heaven, and desires that the heirs of salvation should be with him there, we have good ground to believe that heaven will always be the place of the blessed. There has been much said and written by learned divines and others concerning the final abode of saints. Some have supposed that this world in the time of the millennium will be renovated, and become a new heaven and new earth, and fitted up for the everlasting residence of the blessed. Some have supposed, that what the apostle John calls the kingdom of heaven will descend to earth, and become the eternal abode of Christ and his people. But these appear to be altogether unreasonable and unscriptural opinions. It is repeatedly declared in scripture, that this world shall be burned up at the day of judgment, and never afterwards become an habitation for any rational or irrational creatures. Some, however, have supposed that this world will become the place of the future and everlasting misery of the wicked. But this opinion is repugnant to what Christ has said respecting the decisions of the last day. After he shall have divided the sheep from the goats, or the righteous from the wicked, "Then shall he say unto them on his right hand: come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But to those on his left hand, shall he say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." It appears from this representation, that both the place of the blessed and place of the miserable were prepared for them, from the foundation of the world. And it appears from the parable of Dives and Lazarus, that not only Abraham was then in heaven, but Dives was then in hell, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Ever since the fall of angels and the fall of man, it was necessary that a place should be prepared for the happiness of holy, and a place for the misery of unholy creatures;

and the gospel has brought both these places to light. Though a late writer has attempted to prove, by his profound criticisms upon the Hebrew words which our learned translators have rendered heaven and hell, that there is no such place as hell, he has proved nothing but his ignorance of and opposition to the gospel. Christ, who knew more about the invisible and eternal world than any mere man on earth ever did, has given us full assurance that heaven is the everlasting residence of the righteous, and hell the everlasting abode of the wicked.

3. Since Christ desires that all whom his Father has given him should be with him, we may confidently believe, that all real christians shall finally persevere in holiness and reach the kingdom of heaven. All Methodists of the Wesleyan school, and all Arminians, and some who call themselves Calvinists, deny the doctrine of the certain perseverance of saints, and maintain that they may finally fall away and be lost. Even Mr. Baxter had his doubts upon this subject. But if what has been said in this discourse be true, there is sufficient evidence that all true believers will certainly persevere, and obtain the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. Since Christ desires that all true believers should be with him where he is, he will undoubtedly bring them home to his Father's house, where he has provided many mansions for them. Christ said, that all whom his Father had given him should come to him, and that whosoever came to him, he would in no wise cast out. He farthermore said, " My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." There is the same certainty that saints shall finally persevere, as there is, that God will carry on the good work which he has begun in their hearts, until the day of Jesus Christ. And there is the same certainty that they shall persevere, as there is, that God will reward Christ for his sufferings and death on the cross; for believers are the very reward which he has promised him. The doctrine of saints' perseverance stands upon the same immutable ground as the doctrine of personal election to eternal life.

There is but one plausible objection against this doctrine, and that is drawn from the warnings and cautions given to christians against falling away. But there is no weight in this objection, because such warnings and cautions are proper and necessary means to prevent their falling away. After Paul had positively declared by divine authority to those with him in a shipwreck, that they should certainly be saved, he at the same

time told them by the same authority, that except the sailors should abide in the ship, they would not be saved. And it appears by the event, that it was by means of the sailors all were preserved, and brought safe to land. "We know," saith the apostle, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." There is as plain and infallible evidence of the doctrine of the final perseverance of saints, as of any one doctrine of the gospel.

4. Since Christ desires that all the heirs of salvation should be with him where he is, we may be assured that, as soon as they die, he will receive them to himself, and put them into the mansions which he has prepared for them. We have no reason to think, that he will suffer their souls to be annihilated, or to lie in a state of total insensibility from death till the resurrection of the body. This would be a great loss to Christ as well as to them. It would deprive Christ of all their love and service while they lay in their graves, and deprive them of the holiness and happiness of heaven, while they remain in a state of insensibility. The doctrine of the soul's sleeping after death is a very unscriptural and uncomfortable doctrine. And it is strange that such a man as Bishop Law, and others, should labor to prove that the soul sleeps from death to the resurrection, contrary to plain scripture evidence. Stephen desired and expected that Christ would receive his spirit, as soon as it left the body. Paul desired and expected, that as soon as he was absent from the body, he should be present with the Lord. Peter suggests to christians for their consolation, that they might expect to be admitted to heaven as soon as they had finished their religious course. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." We read of those "who [now] inherit the promises." And we likewise read of "the general assembly and church of the first-born," and of "the spirits of just men made perfect" in heaven. It is a consoling doctrine to christians, that Christ desires that they should be with him in heaven, and will certainly receive them into his blissful presence as soon as they die and leave this dark and evil world.

5. Since Christ desires and intends to collect all his redeemed

ones together to be with him where he is, we may justly conclude that they will be the happiest creatures in heaven. He will be more nearly connected with them and they with him, than any other of the heavenly hosts. He will be their head, and they his members. He will be the vine, and they the branches. He will have a peculiar affection for them which he cannot have for the angels, and they will have a peculiar affection for him, which the angels cannot have for him. He has redeemed them, but he has not redeemed angels. He has forgiven them their sins and saved them from everlasting punishment, but he has not forgiven angels who had no sins to be forgiven, nor saved them from everlasting punishment which they never deserved, and to which they were never exposed. What he has done for his chosen ones, and what they have received from him, has created a stronger mutual affection between them, than can exist between him and the angels. This Christ beautifully illustrated in what he said to Simon Peter, when Mary washed his feet with tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he said, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." All the heirs of salvation are forgiven much, and that through the sufferings and death of their divine Redeemer. They will feel that gratitude to Christ which angels cannot feel, and sing that song of praise which angels can never learn, and which will give Christ a pleasure which angels cannot give him. Their peculiar love to Christ will excite his peculiar love to them, and move him to put them into the best mansions in his Father's house, where they must be the happiest of created beings.

6. Since Christ desires and intends to gather together all his chosen ones into his kingdom, to be with him where he is, we have good ground to believe that those who were the most intimately acquainted and connected here on earth, will be the most intimately acquainted and connected in heaven. The brotherly love of christians forms a band of union, which is permanent and immutable. Many waters cannot quench it, nor the floods drown it; it is stronger than death. This band of union exists among all christians, but is stronger among those who are intimately acquainted and connected, than among

others. It may take a long period for all the heirs of salvation to become acquainted with each other, and after all, some will for ever be more intimately acquainted and connected than others. All mere worldly connections will be dissolved in a future state, but all holy, spiritual connections will for ever remain and increase. Saints carry all their moral excellences with them to heaven, by which they were known and distinguished in this life. John has carried all his peculiar moral excellences to heaven, and will for ever continue to be Christ's beloved disciple. Paul, Peter, James and John, will for ever be distinguished among the twelve apostles. Martha, Mary and Lazarus will be for ever intimately connected, and the peculiar friends of Christ. All pious brothers and sisters, all pious parents and children, all pious husbands and wives, all pious friends, and all pious ministers and their pious hearers, will be for ever known to each other and intimately connected in heaven, and mutually promote each other's felicity. Paul plainly suggests this sentiment in his salutation to the christians at Philippi: "My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown." And he asks the Thessalonians, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." All christians in every part of the world, who are now alive, will very soon meet together with their departed friends in heaven, and their meeting in that holy and happy place must fill their hearts with mutual joy, and remove all the pains and sorrows of their former parting. Those that have gone before are continually waiting for those whom they expect are coming after. Abraham has long been waiting for those families which are to be blessed in him. And all who have been in heaven thousands of years, are still waiting for the immense multitude who are yet to come to them through the millennium, and to the end of the world. There is a near connection between earth and heaven. Part of the heirs of salvation are now in heaven, and part are here on earth. Those in heaven desire that those on earth may be where they are, and those on earth wish to be with them. Their desires are mutual, and shall be completely and for ever gratified.

7. Since Christ receives all the heirs of salvation to himself in heaven, when they leave this world, their pious friends have a peculiar source of consolation under the bereaving hand of providence. Death is one of the blessings inserted in the covenant of grace to believers. Death is theirs; for while it removes them from the presence of the body, it instantly translates them to the presence of the Lord. Death is their happy transition from darkness to light, from sin to holiness,

and from the miseries of this life to the enjoyments of heaven. Though their removal be a loss to their pious friends and to the world they have left, yet it is gain to themselves and to their friends with Christ.. The death of christians undoubtedly produces more joy in heaven, than sorrow and mourning on earth. Though christians ought to mourn the departure of their pious friends, yet they ought not to mourn without hope, which must assuage their grief, and mix consolation with their sorrow. Those who die in peace, and leave a savor of religion behind them, have done all they could to comfort their mourners. This comfort they ought not to refuse, but to prize. It ought to soften their hearts into cordial and cheerful submission to Him who has given them the painful wound they feel.

Mrs. METCALF has left a savor of religion behind her. She gave good evidence that she was an heir of salvation. She had a pious parental education, which exerted a propitious influence upon her character. But God did not leave her to build her hopes of salvation upon such a sandy foundation. He early took her into his own hands, and opened her eyes to see her sinful and perishing condition, which greatly alarmed her fears of future misery. Her awakenings were great and distressing, and followed with clear and strong convictions of the entire depravity of her heart. She found she was an irreconcilable enemy to God, and tried every effort to justify her opposition to God, in holding her in his sovereign hand. This led her to search every corner of her depraved heart, to find something to justify her complaints and hard thoughts of God. Very few persons, perhaps, ever strove longer and more vigorously with their Maker. But divine sovereignty met her at every corner, and at last she gave up the controversy, and became cordially reconciled to God and the terms of salvation. She then found a ground of hope, which was satisfactory to herself and to others. She professed religion, and became a very intelligent christian. Her mental powers were much above mediocrity, which enabled her to understand, above many, the great and distinguishing doctrines of the gospel. She understood how to distinguish nature from grace in her own heart, and in the experience of others. Her religion was uncommonly pure from all dross and tin, and founded upon the clear knowledge of God. She maintained a consistent, amiable, exemplary christian character. It is needless to say, that she was useful in her family, and useful in the world. But she is removed from us, which all her friends have reason to lament, but especially her bereaved husband, her bereaved children, and her bereaved brother. They have reason to sing of mercy as well as judgment. It becomes them to be thankful, that God spared her so

long in the world, and carried her to the verge of old age. Let the bereaved husband receive the consolation which her death affords him. Let the bereaved daughter, who has met with an irreparable loss, remember her own voluntary dedication of herself to God, and trust in his promised faithfulness, and she may still rejoice in the Lord. May the surviving son and surviving brother hear and submit to the voice of God in his providence. May all the members of this church hear God calling upon them, to be ready also. Let them prepare themselves to perform their last great act upon the stage of life, so as to do honor to religion, and leave a source of consolation to their surviving friends.

You have all heard, that none but the heirs of salvation will be admitted into the mansions of heaven; be therefore entreated to inquire, whether you have good ground to hope that you are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." "If children, then heirs." Are you the children of God? Have you the spirit of adoption? Do you desire to be with Christ where he is? If not, you have reason to fear an everlasting separation from God, from Christ, from heaven, from all good; and will not this be a punishment greater than you can bear?

[redacted]

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

This book is under no circumstances to be taken from the Building

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Form 419